

Exile or Exodus:
D. Ugrešić's *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*
and Iliya Troyanov's *The World Is Big and Salvation*
Lurks around the Corner

Dimitar Kambourov

Abstract: The text attempts to offer a theoretical formulae of literature of exile by comparing two exemplary novels in the field: Ugrešić's *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* and Troyanov's *The World is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*. By overcoming their close reading the text comes to the idea of separating exile and nostalgia through a theory of love indifferent humility towards the world as an always already alien and lost home.

Keywords: emigrant literature, exile, nostalgia, memory, globalisation.

...Питам те
защо рисуваш в моите тракийски къщи
танцувачи на фламенко. ...
Питам те,
защо рисуваш белите немкини в черно...
Питам те,
защо рисуваш кипариси и маслини
до брезите на Русия? ...
ти на всяка чужда гара
слизаши в своята Испания, ...
ти рисуваш по земята
само своята Испания.
(Hanchev, V. 1966: 182–184)

It was about that time that my life radically changed, I was living in exile, or whatever it's called. I was changing countries like shoes. I was performing that fall-of-the-Wall item in my own life... With time I acquired an enviable elasticity. ... Those little, firm facts, stamps in our passport, accumulate and at certain moment they become illegible lines. They suddenly begin to trace an inner map, the map of the unreal, the imaginary. And it is only then that they express the immeasurable experience of exile. Yes, exile is like a nightmare ... it seems to us that we have already been there... (Dubravka Ugrešić 1997: 118–9)

A Bulgarian joke from the communist period, unsure of whether it should stay in the realm of philosophy or venture into politics, goes: A man is at the tailor's to have a suit made. The tailor says: "Come tomorrow, the suit will be ready, no need of fitting." The man comes in on the next day and the suit is ready, only when he tries it on, it looks terrible: the one sleeve is longer than the other, one of the creases goes astray, the left shoulder is higher, the right one hangs. "What is this?" asks the man. "Don't worry, everything will be fine, could you raise a little the right shoulder and drop the left, now turn this leg inside and stretch this arm, well, you see now how beautifully it fits you and suits you!" The man then walks along the street in his new suit and with his new gait and hears someone sharing with his companions: "Look, what a freak yet how beautifully his suit suits him!"

The following joke is about a man who has been caught as he was trying to cross the border, all dressed in white. "Hey, stupid, where are you off to with this white suit on?" asks the guard. The man starts brushing his suit and murmurs: "Where on Earth am I heading for with this white suit on?"

The issue of the recently flourishing literature written by migrants, exiles or trans-national nomads seems to be well covered by these jokes. Once it has been abandoned, the motherland is bound to remain both an object of disgust and of desire; the better the new identity suits the worse it fits – as if a well-made suit on a freak not aware of where he is going. The question is what makes this sort of literature indispensable today.¹ If these were the quantitative data on the size of print runs, the number of awards and the general perception of freshness and vitality imported – or smuggled – into the somewhat stuffy atmosphere of contemporary western literature(s), it would be rather a question of literary history and cultural analysis.²

If it is the next 'latest thing', it should probably be contextualized through concepts like globalization, free flow of people, goods and services, exoticism, book market, publishing empires, bored or borrowed critics, etc. Then it would not require a theoretical apparatus tailored expressly for it, as the post-structuralist post-modern ready-

made 'difference' would do. Indeed, the recent theoretical and artistic reflections on the phenomenon imply such sufficiency. Twenty or so years after Deleuze and Guattari's "Toward a Minor Literature" there is not much new work done on approaching theoretically the issue of today's cross-border, trans-national, immigrant, diasporic or exilic literature and art.³ The questions of memory and writing outside the nation have been addressed in various ways.⁴ The concepts of in-betweenness, hybridity and creolisation have been put at work and a kind of theoretical appendix has been supplemented to the already established theoretical difference readapted to serve another identity project.⁵

Since the tendency seems irreversible, the question is whether there are theoretical gains to be made out of it or does exilic literature rather lead to a theoretical predicament? If modern writers are exiles *per se*, predestined to make neither prophet nor profit in their home countries, does it really make any difference whether they write 'home' or 'abroad'? Is not their work then but another agency challenging the very notions of 'home' and 'abroad'? If we agree with Kristeva that the modern writer is predestined to be cosmopolitan, then either the exiled writers simply share all too literally the fate of the essential writers-exiles or such literalness naturalizes the common status of today's writer.⁶ Is not the writer of modernity deterritorialized by definition through the literal and metaphorical power of so radically temporal an adjective as 'modern'? Or is it that in cases of exile and immigration, theory once again exposes the unique personal experiences as a universal metaphor, thus blurring the differences and burying the singularity?

The recent interest in the literature of exile might have the ingenious design to provide a biographical, existential, or natural motivation for writing that goes beyond any natural, mimetic or psychological impulse. Such motivation would again have a structurally taming effect, though.

Is it possible, then, to tackle the literature of exile in a non-domesticating way? Could we conceive of a theory of exile writing that goes beyond its reading as another reincarnation of the postmodern idiom, only this time naturalized and morally justified? Since the issue of literary exiles and immigrations is gaining currency, perhaps it spells a necessity to tackle it today, particularly in order to

check for a better theory: is exilic literature a flash (or ashes) of a fashion or is it a tendency to reshape the map of writing?

This text will be dealing with two representative texts of exilic literature in the hope of contributing to a blueprint of such theory. My presumption is that two very different novels brought together by the common topic of exile should suffice to outline a territory that might call for a theoretical approach. Perhaps none of these novels might necessarily be judged as an event on its merits; however, the two of them could either make it to the level of an event or their analysis could demonstrate that they are but another exemplification of the already existing theoretical idiom.

The field is relatively new, which accounts for its conceptual diversity. ‘Diasporic literature’ seems to be an unlucky coinage as it reduces the literary function to a community of expatriates on an ethnic and/or religious basis. The concept fails to express the solitude and isolation or respectively the ways of integration or affiliation of those living abroad. Immigrant and respectively emigrant literature foreground the act of a human being rather than the features of his or her writing. To distinguish immigrant from emigrant literature makes sense only from the perspective of national literatures recognizing its emigrants writing abroad and its immigrants from abroad writing within the country. Trans-national literature remains confined to the logic and nomination of what it is about to overcome or transcend. From another perspective, trans-national appears to be attractive only as an anticipatory or futuristic concept, since even a global distribution is incapable of overcoming the spell of literary language and its publicity, including marketing, readership, awards and critiques. My preference for the concept of exilic literature is based on the assumption that it is literature that tackles the issue of exile and the latter motivates its artistic enquiries and enables us to present it as homeless, prodigal literature. In the course of the argument an alternative concept will be offered.

“Although the diversity of diasporic writing does not lend itself to abstract categorization, which would effectively erase or neutralize differences, the works discussed here share the common feature of being both creative and experimental and self-reflexive and theoretical”, writes Azade Seyhan in her seminal book (2001, p.13). The texts to be discussed here will sail through the self-reflexivity test; they might be aptly described as both experimental and

theoretical, and perhaps also “creative”, whatever that means. Although they address exile in the traditional terms of loss, solitude, emptiness, nostalgia, etc., they refrain from making diagnoses or from indulging in somber self-lamentation. Exile is in focus, it is the alpha and the omega of those novels yet its interpretation goes well beyond the commonsensical articulations.

The novels of interest are *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* by Dubravka Ugrešić and *Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall* (*The World is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner*) by Iliya Troyanov. The original reasons for this choice were both personal and national. A copy of Ugrešić’s novel was signed to me in 2000 and I pledged to write something on this contemporary masterpiece. Ugrešić – one of the most renowned contemporary writers of exile – writes in Croatian and was born in Croatia, but her exile in the early 90s from Zagreb is prefigured by her Bulgarian mother’s departure in the late 40s from Varna, my hometown. Troyanov’s novel is loosely based on his personal experience of a 6-year-old boy whose parents took him along when they emigrated from Bulgaria. Troyanov writes in German yet he has spent many years outside Europe: ironically, his family emigrated, driven by the dream of the promise land of Germany, but a few months later his father was sent to work in Kenya, a fact that made of the future writer a professional nomad.

The two novels share enough to outline a vision on exilic literature. However, it is the disparity within the ‘sameness’ that would be of even greater interest. Each of the novels absorbs creatively the genres of memoir, autobiography and travelogue in favor of the omnivorous genre of the novel. Each of them insists on a non-linear evolution with abrupt leaps in time and place. Troyanov’s novel is more scrupulous but also more fictional in dealing with time. Ugrešić is rather loose in specifying her timeframe once the exilic experience has been shared. The events unfold as the narrator returns home. Since she changes home for the suitcase (one of her metaphors for exile), the time-places start to blur, fuse and confuse, very much like the places in space: both are being traversed rather than visited or attended. Thus in both cases the story is told in an apparently disorderly manner. By contrast, Troyanov does stick to a plot, albeit suggested as a deliberately fake premise for the genuine happening. The plot involves a belated second life initiation, refiguring exile as an

outlet for the wider world and thus overcoming the initial self-closure. In fact, this autistic isolation finds its counterpoint in Ugrešić's novel: when her narrator refers to exile, her writing is permeated with (quasi-) quotations from other people – friends, acquaintances, strangers, writers, artists, etc., all of them sharing the destiny of exile. Thus the parts dedicated to the actual experience of exile, be it in the layered museum city of Berlin or during the innumerable journeys, all these parts usher in an enormous amount of the speech of others: as if the narrator has lost her ability to formulate any statement unless it is endowed with someone else's authority or at least compassionate presence; unless it is shared by – or ascribed to – someone else. This creates an odd polylogue of solitary voices entangled in a talk at cross-purposes. Although the dialogue seems to be doomed and the statements remain wrapped in the quotation marks of their essential detachment, the overall effect is less and more of a polyphony: rather, these accumulated desolations create a Ligeti-like spatial, cosmic vertigo.

Troyanov remains split between the requirements of exilic literature and his adherence to the safe-side model of the modern novel, whose narrative is based on a single story propped by two characters, in this case those of an ailing exile and of his godfather determined to rescue him. The novel sticks to a largely linear narration: fleeing the country, followed by a spell in an immigration camp and, after a 25-year leap into time, the central story of the main characters' escaping the hospital, touring the world and returning home to an anxious godmother unfolds. Still, the device of skipping between unfinished, *in-medias-res* stories, with pauses, gaps and omissions syncopates and energizes the writing. There is a telling moment when the godfather urges his godson to put his fantasy at work; we find him protesting a bit later: "Now you only enumerate, Alex... You should use what you've seen, there should be a story, a development!" (my translation from Bulgarian, p.89). In fact this wish remains wishful thinking both for the godson and for the narrating strategy of the novel in general. The reader will never be able to tell whether the consistent failure of storytelling about the ailing émigré is due to performative purposes or to inaptitude. The author remains faithful to exilic literature's dictum to scatter a bundle of places and moments whose interconnections, both temporal and causal, remain loose. Thus while Ugrešić weaves her polyphonic texture out of

numerous voices, moments and places, all appearing in a motley, ostensibly chaotic sequence, Troyanov starts with a rather elaborate time alternation only to quietly abandon it, yielding before a much tidier narrative continuity. At the end of the day, however, both Troyanov and Ugrešić achieve the similar effect of the displaced and thus universal actuality of any moment by subjecting it to a seemingly whimsical order imposed by the power – or rather weakness – of memory.

Such trimmed and truncated narration is both typical and telling for the essence of exilic literature. The linear narrative unity projects a particular model of a world and a life incompatible with exile as both experience and inscription. Continuity, causality and completion are in fact implicitly discredited by exilic literature as the foundational myths and the ideal models of *oikos*-focused literature. Exilic experience or its faithful writing subverts the smooth linear narration even when the latter seems pursued by the author. Exilic literature avoids the fabulation principle that has held sway over the novel up to its postmodern condition. Exilic literature mixes outwardly random phrases – overheard or recalled – of casual people and texts. Thus its story-telling abstains from the triple unity of place, time and action as the even parts of Ugrešić's and Troyanov's entire text prove. The exilic narrative, as a rule, re-tells and quotes by heart, its stories failing to obtain beginning, climax or ending, their model being the one of the lame anecdote with a vague moral. The only things happening to the literary exile are the stories and the words of the other exiles – factual or actual, real or realized as such. The literary exile develops a certain sensitivity for those secondary, 'artificial' exiles who become such without abandoning their countries or being banned from them. The act of exile emerges as a peculiar event deprived of story but possessing the gift of identifying exile in all its reincarnations.

In effect, the shared poignant nostalgia for the past and the lost mother-country is balanced by (self) ironic disillusionment with regard to the spaces and times of refuge. By leaving home, the exile also forsakes the ideal and the idea of home: its abandoning reveals it as always already impossible or rather unfeasible. Thus the notorious shared love-hate for both the old and the new home-country is a somewhat misleading way to grasp the point here: that after the initiation of leaving there are no arrivals and returns left. The regular

repertoire about exile such as the punishment of the past regarded as equal to a death sentence should be given perhaps a less sentimental interpretation: exile is a symbolic death with refused metempsychosis mainly because it subverts the idea of home and thus of return, of coming back, as well as of settling anew, of rebuilding a nest. Exile is but a symbolic act which makes space look like time – i.e. unidirectional and fluid.

Each of these novels is aware that home and home country are precious, not least because they have to do with the early years when things are not yet bound to be overlooked; they are here to stay in the mind due to the fresh cartridge of the memory machine. According to the two novels, exile is just an articulation, a sanction of a universal act: that of losing the early past of childhood and adolescence. Exilic literature is a literature of initiation not only as a sanctioned transfer into a new age and social status but also as a particular right to forget and neglect, to drop and omit, to leave behind, to be absent-minded in the literal awareness that the world is a place to be passed over. Therefore, an identity problem for exilic literature would be how to sneak away from the traditions of *Bildungs* and memoir literature, which deal predominantly with growing up: childhood, adolescence, youth... The figure of the left or lost home preventing return is a common allegory of the early years of unique experience when things happen for the first time. Abandoning home therefore might appear as an overdone attempt to displace the loss of the precious early years. Leaving home might be also a more ambitious attempt to prolong infinitely the slipping time of initial and unique experiences. In this sense the literature of loss obligingly becomes a literature of deferred loss of first-time things. The possibility of looking at it as an acted-out secondary childhood offers a tempting perspective on exilic literature. The immense heed that Ugrešić's and Troyanov's novel pay to the innocuous experience of infancy and youth there being represented as potentially prolonged through writing, sheds light on exilic literature as a loss of home and youth infinitely deferred through their artistic reproduction. Childhood, like living in poverty, in a poor country or age, informs experience with uniqueness, otherwise unattainable. However, such an exilic postponement is in fact incapable of overcoming the effect of secondary repetitiveness, of reiteration without authentic return. Thus the tempting hypothesis that exile is, apart from anything else, an ingenious attempt to prevent the real

initiation of growing up or aging by providing an endless first-time experience appears to be ironically dismissed by exilic literature.

Exilic literature is about eternal non-arrival anywhere, and by the same token, about uniform failure and deferred return, very much evoking the short story by Thomas Bernhard, in which a train never exits a tunnel. It is a nomadic literature but not in the sense of beatnik road writing obsessed by the act and process of travelling. The gaze of the exile is struck by the peculiar myopia of a reflexive backward glance; when driving he/she finds his/her bearings through the rear-view mirror. This tendency has to do with the subverted cult for the first-time experience whose gift is actually or symbolically lost with the act of exilic initiation. As a result, the exile develops a kind of double vision: the fresh and juicy reappearance of the pre-exile experience, made up of first times, and the second, *post-mortem* life in exile, where things are deprived of depth and density but have absorbed instead the words and the dispersed stories of others. In effect, the world appears to be a dream-like surface reality stripped of its thickness and thus stultifying any scrutiny or devotion. The new places in such a world are not important in themselves but only to the extent that they trigger an associational chain shackling indiscriminately past and present. As if the actual world were structured like a language, i.e. like a dream. The place of photography in Ugrešić's novel is quite in point here: its 'semi-arrived' reality is haunted by reminiscent remnants deprived of depth, substance, density and thus of enigma. While reading Ugrešić's novel, one gets the impression that she knows and recognizes everything she encounters along her ramblings through Berlin. In the same vein, Bai Dan (the godfather) in Troyanov's novel manages to embroil his phlegmatic godson into a global trip; they are passing through cities as if without getting off from their tandem bicycle, as if going sightseeing in a dream. The small death of the exile makes everything beyond both unreal and all-too-well-known.

The paradox of childhood is the one of travelling: it always has to do with the memory of a happiness that should have been there and then but was neither then nor is it now, not least because its experience was missed then and is missing now. The happiness was there; it's just that there was no one to feel it. Now, when there is someone that can remember that past as happy, this happiness is past and its actual revitalizing is hampered by the very understanding that

the moment is gone and has been missed; thus the moment now is filled with a sense of happiness as doubly lost – there and now.

Exile thus solidifies the paradox of childhood/travelling: visiting and memorizing a new place is possible to the extent that it triggers the experience of a previous place from the past, which in turn has evoked the vision of another place and time. Exile is a time machine providing justification for the most fundamental human experience of loss by giving it a (possible) name – exile. As a result, the pandemic sense of pain that pierces Ugrešić's novel and fails to work out in Troyanov's book, is always informed by the elegiac time and the intellectual distance of recognized, named and fortified loss. Hence, the restrained ironic slant, as if pain were perceived rather than suffered; a sense rather than a sensibility.

Exilic literature is thus made to a rare recipe, mixing reminiscence, myopia, boredom, irony and pain: a remembering wrapped in the painful experience of loss with untimely short-sightedness petrifying in the morbid boredom of the post-loss world.

The organizational principle of the novels is as efficient as it is reflectively laid bare. Ugrešić's novel is illustrated at the very beginning by the enlisting of what is found in the stomach of Roland the walrus. "The chapters and fragments which follow should be read in a similar way", continues the narrator and adds: "if the reader feels that there are no meaningful or firm connections between them, let him be patient: the connections will establish themselves of their own accord" (p.1). Troyanov's opening chapter also assembles fragments and episodes with no apparent cohesion or unity: the story of a family narrated with alternations from generation to generation borders on a perplexing exuberance that suggests family life's density and self-sufficiency. Still, Ugrešić is much more eager to report in advance the techniques that are to operate in her writing, not only as rhetorical or performative strategies but also as objects or activities that are to be discussed: a photography of unknown women, the family photo-album, the mother's bag, the museum of Odon von Horvath, organized around the principle of the writer's changing height, the writer's villa residency, sea-shore stone gathering, the magpie treasures of a madwoman... "I have no desire to be witty. I have no desire to construct a plot. I am going to ... compile quotations" (p.11), says Ugrešić, quoting Shklovsky at the end of her first chapter, which

brings to completion the arrangement of the bits and pieces she has brought to her exile, "all random and meaningless" (p.232).

Exilic literature's meaning is thus set to be hidden, promised and forever postponed. It is premised upon the paradigm of the random museum, of the photo-album, of the hobby-collection, of the autobiography. The reader might be tempted to subsume the exilic strategies under the postmodern trademark of encyclopedia but the proximity would be rather ostensible. The encyclopedic principle by definition excludes the decisive role of the selecting subject: encyclopedias are principally anonymous, unmarred by an author or authorship, as if impartial, non-subjective and in a sense inhuman. Memoir, autobiography, photo album, personal collection, even museum are made up of and for proper names of entities at hand. The goal of truth or reality *as such* yields before a subjective message behind the principle of arrangement. Yet the intentional message also happens to be subverted by the material itself, which resists, goes astray, dissociates, disperses, disengages. The exceptional presence of the visual arts in Ugrešić's novel perhaps has to do with the notorious mystery of curatorial practice, whose only warranted meaning and shared message is the curator's signature, the proper name standing behind. Exilic literature seems to owe more to curatorial art than to classical narration: the literary exile arranges the material at hand and in store like a curator, hoping for a split between the will to elicit its meaning and to let it grow and rise by its own will. The main attraction of such artwork comes from the challenging enigma of its organizational principle; a principle that not only allows but also stages breakages and failures of any conceivable logic, message, intention, meaning, sense, symmetry, regularity, proper beauty. To undo one's own game is as crucial for a good curator as it is for a literary exile.

Such (self-subversive) organizational principle raises a question: if exilic literature bets on the free assemblage of quotations, phrases, stories, bits and pieces, whose presumed unity is 'sanctioned' by the authority of a 'weak' author enlisting rather than narrating or 'figuring out', then how is this sort of literature different from the general postmodern strategy of collage/montage of genres, styles, times, borrowed characters, stories, even arts, books, discourses? Whereas the postmodern author pretends to be more or less dead by ordaining authority to language, literary tradition, history, geography,

encyclopedia, archive, etc., the literary exile claims a restored authority by virtue of his/her trespassing and transgressing agency. The literary exile gives up the agencies of totality – not only the one of God, but also the Aristotelian unities of narrative (action), of home (place) and of shared successiveness (time), let alone those of proper grammar, national literary language, genre, discourse, style, etc. The claim to being that unique unity, that vast vessel that witnesses an inimitable constellation of places, phases and stories is barely humble. By giving up the third person past tense panoramic viewpoint, exilic literature relinquishes the system of characters moving in their shared trajectories in time and space. The exile is principally incapable of possessing a companion, a satellite. The moment he or she acquires or allows one, he/she ceases to be an exile. Exile is a solitary human project whereas immigration implies dwelling, settling, taming the other(ness) back home, re-domesticating. The moment the adult escapee in Troyanov's novel is involved in the 'tandem' tour with his godfather throughout the old and the new worlds, he becomes just another Ulysses on his way home, no matter how meandric his route might be. Genuine exilic literature actually challenges the basic literary structures of chrono-topos shared by two or more characters. The possible association with the picaresque novel, which is based on loosely connected episodes dominated by a protagonist, is also misleading because here the exile is outlined by his endemic inability to provoke a story. The exile is the one to whom nothing actually happens except for the words and the stories of others.⁷

The nomadic version of exilic literature thus overcomes exile by rendering it into a profession. Ugrešić's novel is an example of such travel turning into travels. Yet nomadic literature is by no means a travelogue. After discarding its narrative duties, nomadic literature seeks to get rid of another temptation – the one of the travel notes. Both Ugrešić and Troyanov solve this problem in a similar way: by fragmenting their observations, by cutting the pictures, by depriving the narrative of details, names and usage instructions, by revealing the 'insignificance', the dizzying inconspicuousness of cities, countries, peoples, life forms. This accounts for the fact that, contrary to the Aristotelian literary dictum, the character in exilic literature is far more important than action. The characters are somehow intact by what has been happening to them and preserve quite a paradoxical self-identity for creatures in a state of flux: as if after exile nothing can

befall them. The unity is on the side of the character, not on the side of the story. Even more paradoxical is the fact that the unity of the character is achieved rather negatively, since the protagonist is more present through his or her absence. Both Troyanov and Ugrešić's narrators are much less present in their personal stories than in their way of telling the stories of others. The *I* seems to be possible only to the extent that it faces and transmits a world of selves with proper names.

Therefore it turns out that the postmodern/poststructuralist theory of writing based on difference is not immediately applicable to nomadic literature for a simple reason. A key postmodern narrating strategy translates the time axis into simultaneous space structures, transposes remote moments into neighboring places, which fuse with each other. Exilic literature is an anti-postmodern project as it resurrects the power and authority of the subject. The exiles – it turns out – are creatures who move permanently, cross borders, end up in different places but their travelling ethos makes them dwellers of a homeless time. This is another reason for the narrative to be systematically subverted. Nothing could actually happen when the logic of space-moving and place-changing depends on time flow rather than on any form of causality.

The present time in Ugrešić's mutant, archaeological Berlin consists of multilayered, molding impressions, words, thoughts, feelings of the others and the *I* indiscriminately. Hence the ineradicable sense of journalism, of report, of essay; and also of meditation, of interpretation. Another effect of this is the drive to trespass the borders between arts, discourses and mediums. Troyanov's character is almost dead in his present life but remains discursively rich, stylistically diverse and polyglot in general. Ugrešić's protagonist strolls through Berlin only to see it through and through as a palimpsest of her multilayered nomadic time rather than only as her dismantled Yugoslavia. Photography, visual art and urban guide-like writing are put together to resurrect what was, what has gone and what is to be by the power of memory as a model for exilic literature.

Such seemingly loose narrative structure in fact spots the main engine of the internal unity – the protagonist. Ugrešić's novel seems to have a more traditional first-person narrative structure, emulating the genres of a free-floating autobiography or a memoir. Troyanov's

novel seems to play a more writerly game by shifting the narrating voices and thus developing a polyphonic effect. Yet it is the insipid taste of false expectations and annoyance with regard to *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner* that casts doubt on the entire field of emigrant literature, when it is incapable of achieving the status of nomadic writing. Although the author puts at work relatively modern or even contemporary narrative techniques – shifting of narrating voices, changing styles, alternating temporal layers and memory, vision and imagination respectively – his writing remains wearily overworked. The ultimate power of metonymy as a device for personal representation leads to an embarrassing reductive vision of what it is to be human. This is what does not work in Troyanov's novel and this is what relegates it to a decent example of emigrant writing: he thematizes what should not be talked about directly, i.e. feelings. His protagonist, on the verge of death because he has lost his zest for life, is saved by a character, combining a hero and a trickster. The protagonist's melancholy is rather phlegmatic, his lost ability to communicate blocks the access of the reader to his vague and dim tragedy. Thus when life should be regained and the character should appear cured, the tramp-like character of the story makes both the intellectual and the emotional contact shunt. An over-interpretation might go as far as to insist that such an effect is premeditated and the novel relies on such grotesque staleness in order to imply the effects of exile or immigration; however, boredom is barely an excuse.

Also, this appears rather too dated as a technique: the novel starts in a quasi-Joycean style borrowed from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* but changes its typical voice emulation of different ages for a Balkan ironically detached version of South American Magic Realism. Soon the latter is replaced by a technique of the late 19th century: a face-value set of expressions whose real meaning is given in brackets, for example: "oh, how sweet! (which is to say: positive predilection); what a caramel! (a sign of growing excitement), thou, empty sugar-bowl! (disappointment)..." (pp.26-27). It is as early as page 16 that the powerful title of the book is hazardously gambled away through the profane explanation that the sugar beet, languishing on local soil, has been safely replaced by the sugar-cane export from Cuba; the conclusion is that "big is the world and salvation lurks around the corner". Finally, the legendary-fairy-tale manner is also given up in favor of a leap somewhat 30 years later into the actuality

marked by the unchallenged power of metonymy in dialogues like the following: “We are summoning aids for the military cemeteries”, says the uniform. “I, instead, want to have my own Pershing”, replies the pajamas” (p.32). The point is not only that this is not funny; not even that it is a dated way of writing - of course, one could imagine a kind of post-postmodern strategy of returning to the manners of the great realistic pre-war novel as a gesture of reaction and rejection. The point is that it is neither relevant nor efficient. This mix of Max Frisch with *roman nouveau* and a spoiled Aleko Konstantinov⁸ leaves the impression of backward, obsolete writing. The narrative strategies are like trappings deprived of function: there are no gains neither in the sequential change of the narrators, nor in the change of styles. “Nobody cares a damn!” protests a Bulgarian character in English, leaving the impression of a broken polylogue.

Troyanov’s writing feels concerned mainly with its sophisticated verbal command, cancelling any uncertainty. Troyanov seems to be tolerable through his well-earned techniques in the first part, alternating a semi-legendary semi-historically shaped pre-natal biography of the protagonist. Already the ending of this part, however, is consumed by the disturbing bulk of the novel. Troyanov is persuasive only when his narrator, a) has to rely on invention, fabulation and imagination, b) relies on the diegesis of epic narration and description, c) does not rely on memory, and d) his characters do not talk. In other words, Troyanov is unable to reproduce neither his own nor anybody else’s experience and is even more helpless when his men and women have to converse. Thus Troyanov is least convincing in the exile components of his novel: the latter require knowing the languages of different people from different cultures and times. Troyanov is capable of emulating a realistic novel idiom from the first half of the 20th century but he is either predictable when he speaks from memory or artificial when has to mimic human conversation or speech. Troyanov leaves the impression that his (character’s) exile has extricated him from any form of live experience and endowed him instead with the dubious gift of the books. Thus Troyanov’s writing is again a regressive one; however, it does not look for refuge in his mother’s tongue(s) but rather in the western tradition of the patriarchs of the novel. It is telling that his character is given the highly unlikely family name Luxov, i.e.

Luxurious: such is the style, such is the legacy, but immigration never quite makes it to literary exile.

What saves this novel is its unpretentiously diligent and conscientious professionalism combined with a kind of disarmingly plain sincerity. Exilic literature has instead the task to correspond to its adjective and to overcome the notion of lost, forsaken or revoked national belonging, in order to have its say.

Ugrešić's play with the genres of testimony provides a much richer texture haunted by personal voices, stories and fates. Despite the radical perspectivism, her novel prefers to talk about the others. In fact, the only objects endowed with density in her writing are those with double refraction: the new nomad seems to be able to sense, feel, even love only through the senses, attitudes and bodies of the others. The latter accounts for the numerous thoughts and stories of people we are told little or nothing about. In fact, the narrator appears to be least persuasive when she takes the risk of playing confessional.⁹ But Ugrešić's narrator is exceptionally convincing when she is hidden behind her characters and their stories. The reader communicates on a deeper level with the narrator when she seems to be most missing. The narrative's objective correlative of interpretive story-telling is decoded by the reader in an empathy which releases an ample amount of feelings, never mentioned or performed directly. Thus Ugrešić's narrator cautiously purifies and restricts her presence to the level of intellect and description, of irony and self-irony, of insight and its inevitable blindness whereas the reader accomplishes the work with empathy and compassion whose cathartic effect does not impair the intellectual aura while humanizing it.¹⁰

A somewhat paradoxical effect of the restored authority of the subject in her writing is the power of the knowing gaze. It sometimes robs the constructed world of its diversity and richness. The narrator's perspective is so powerful, so colorful, so devouring that the things and the characters appear deprived of autonomy, existence or enigma. The first impression is that the world told appears entirely interpreted, understood, disenchanting, and reduced to a particular meaning or message. This is often done in an extremely gifted and ravishing way: Dubravka Ugrešić seems to be aware of the predicament of the partial glance; therefore she elaborates her embroiled embroidery of unfolding irony, of insightful parody, of merciless truth-uttering.

However, the effect is of a radical demystification that never doubts and whose answers always come out. Thus the powerful, convinced and persuasive voice of her overtly analytical narration leaves a somewhat discouraging impression of an all-too-trained and tainted vision, of a foretold and tamed voice. The narrator applies various techniques to avoid this disenchanting monologue of a life lesson known by heart: as already said, she multiplies the voices of alleged friends, acquaintances, occasional pick-ups, and overheard strangers; she periodically shifts the manner of narration (but never the style) by replacing description with someone's story, narration with moral or insight; she periodically flees from her own territory of words and thoughts to the neighboring ground of visual arts, photography, urban culture, new media, archaeology of everyday life and the art of sewing. She is almost ascetic in referring to the narrator's personal life. Deprived of the feather of personal destiny she resembles a new Wandering Jew or a Borges-like Shakespeare doomed to tell the stories of others. However, unlike the latter and very much like a cursed contemporary humanitarian, she knows and understands too much. Her writing on exile at times ferments to an overweening universal competence. Ugrešić's paresia at times appears to lead to a paralysis.

However, her exilic literature is also one of pain. This unique combination of competence, distance and irony and, on the other hand, of all-pervasive pain seems to require a better adjusted analytics, perhaps one that will reconsider the structure of Ugrešić's novel.

From the very beginning it declares a reluctance verging on abstinence regarding the narrative. Instead of narrating, it chooses to perform different genres, arts and practices in order to find proper instrumentaria fitting its main topic. The tools mostly consist of the working and the production of memory in a weird way of juxtaposing personal and historical bits and pieces. Those pieces are not meant to fit into a narrative structure while they are good at representing a biography.

Being a more or less reflected subversion of the narrative as literarily essential, exilic literature replaces its deliberate deficiency with adjusted borrowings (as I have already pointed out) from the poetics of different arts or practices. As a preliminary justification for

their implementation, Ugrešić points to their artistic deficiencies which from a particular perspective might become aesthetic advantages, especially in the eyes of literary professionals. As if tucking under an aesthetic program, Ugrešić comments on what she strives for along the very act of achieving it – the effect of the photo-album, of the museum collection, of the curatorial or artistic project, of autobiography. Traditionally the technique of stripping out the device generates estrangement or a *Verfremdungs* effect. A greater gain for Ugrešić would be, however, if such reflexivity did not prevent the text from achieving the effect of pain in the most elaborate manner of ‘non-professional’ imitation of professionalism.

From this perspective, it seems more plausible that exilic literature provides an alternative: in overcoming its own predicaments it turns into a literature we would call nomadic, which is the case with Ugrešić’s novel, or to get domesticated as an incarnation of immigrant literature, which happens to Troyanov’s book. Ugrešić’s literary project is eager to suggest this essential immeasurability of *exile or whatever it’s called*. The horizon of expectations with regard to the exiles is by no means one, unified or unanimous, yet it is not protected from being categorical: either cynically distrustful with regard to the pangs of banishment or superficially compassionate with regard to the doom of homelessness. Nomadic literature in fact strives to avoid the trap of *exile* as being automatically associated with *nostalgia* or *homesickness*. Perhaps a model for nomadic literature provides the allegory of the ex-colonies rather than the parable of the prodigal son. English allows this pun as mother country could both be ‘mother land’ and ‘parent state’. Very much like the ex-colonies, which fought for and finally achieved their independence, the attitude towards the mother country is exceptionally ambiguous. From the perspective of the literary exile, the mother country is both a motherland and an ex-colonizer.

So what is the message behind these techniques of fragmentation, of piled bits and pieces of impressions, conversations, quotations, memories; what is the purport of this enigmatic museum of failed meanings at work here: mother’s bag, photo album, odd collections, visual projects, flea market, concise biographies, all of them marked by descriptive excess and narrative deficit. The critical approach towards narrative as implicitly holistic and potentially totalizing should offer an alternative.

Undoubtedly, such an alternative model would claim to be more authentic, to render better the reality or its experience. Its alternative techniques are barely new, though. What is it that rescues nomadic literature from falling either into the modernist assemblage, or, from a different perspective, into the postmodern collage/montage? In other words, what makes the well-known organizational principle work and mean differently?

It does not take long for the reader, initially fascinated by the impression of aleatoricism, to figure out that Ugrešić's novel is in fact a hyper-organized text. It comprises seven parts, four of which – the odd numbers – appear under titles in German and stitch together numbered paragraphs, whose sequence is continued throughout the novel. As for the even parts, they are dedicated to different periods of the narrator's past, named after different individuals, who appear to be her anticipatory doubles: her mother in the second part; six encounters with exiles or internal émigrés in the fourth part (an overemotional American with a Polish name, an Indian, the Bulgarian grandmother, a lesbian couple, an East-German nostalgic cook, and a Portuguese one-nighter), the narrator's best female friends from the abandoned Croatia in the sixth part, who are six so as to correspond to the stories of the fourth part. It is also clear that the second and the sixth parts are organized around two photographs and that the photographic principle of writing is crucial for them. It is obvious as well that the first one and the seventh are mostly devoted to Berlin as a museum of incommensurability, whereas the third and the fifth focus on the exilic experience of the contemporary visual arts of assemblage. The mirroring principle of palindrome accomplishes the refined symmetries. Unsurprisingly, they are made to tilt, stumble and dismantle themselves at times: the story about the summer visits to the grandmother is placed not in the childhood part next to the extended portrayal of the mother but among the six travelogues; also, the description of Kabakov's art works is situated in the part devoted to the album as a family museum. Therefore, the reader faces an almost perfect yet delicately dynamized symmetry providing the beauty both of order and rhythm as well as of free associations and random choice.

Still, it remains unclear which of the strategies prevails: the one of disorderly and spontaneous assemblage or the one of symmetry, repetition, eternal return and all-encompassing self-identity and unity. Undoubtedly, Ugrešić's novel strives to achieve a subtle balance

between order and disorder, between a meaninglessly bare life and its meaningful interpretation. The stakes are high because conveying life as it is and conveying meanings require strategies that are often at odds with each other. Such an elaborate organisation is the ultimate goal of any art above a certain level. Ugrešić's novel might be easily located among a lot of contemporary and older literary examples which equilibrate between order and disorder, between holistic sameness and scattered matchlessness. If the readers are unable to grasp this cautious balance, they might take the book as both disentangled and repetitive, chaotic and predictable, dispersed and self-reproductive, and thus possibly doubly far-fetched.

However, such a balance can hardly be peculiar to nomadic literature, whose theoretical particularity should not be restricted to its organizational principle of mirroring chaos or dismantling order. The readers might feel tempted to accept such elaborate disorder as charged to perform the very essence of exile, which, being deprived of the Aristotelian unity of time, place and action, i.e. of home-focused biography, replaces it with literary symmetries of radical displacement. It is therefore possible to see exile as triggering a whole system of transfers, displacements and sublimations, among which the one of interpreting exile as an essential human condition is the most salient.

However, if nomadic literature was about the painful experience of a home-freak, it would hardly be of particular interest. A reading that relegates exilic literature to the stage of homesickness, of suffering because of a particular loss and want, would miss the light side of the exilic moon. Ugrešić's writing provides ruses so as to enable a reading that creates hasty causal links between exile, nostalgia and pain. Yet the contradictions and the contrasting principles on which Ugrešić's novel stands subvert such causality.

First, the book is premised on the fundamental ambiguity of nostalgia as both homesickness and 'passed-time sickness'. The novel suggests that exile is both articulation and reworking of the initial initiation of growing up; certainly, with an element of counter-projection because leaving home to some extent displaces the growing up: the prodigal son – like a figural anticipation of the sci-fi astronaut moving at the velocity of light – is incapable of growing.

There is another misleading temptation, though: to treat Ugrešić's book as smart, ironic, and critical in the way and on the level her

essays and interviews work. Nor should one be satisfied with interpreting Ugrešić's novel as a twofold critique with regard to both media and literature despite her sneering disdain concerning the narrative-dominated media. Ugrešić not only ironically reshuffles the postmodern idiom, but she is also entirely aware what she wants to achieve and where further to go. In fact, in the initial two chapters the narrator or the author herself formulates cautiously an aesthetic manifesto and an artistic program preparing the reader. The key points of this aesthetic program have to do with the powerful artistic weakness of both the photo-album and autobiography:

Both the album and autobiography are by their very nature amateur activities, doomed from the outset to failure and second-rateness... There is only one thing that both genres can count on ... and that is the blind chance that they will hit upon the point of pain. When that happens ... then the ordinary amateur creation emerges victorious, on another non-aesthetic level, turning even the most splendid artistic work to dust. In literature such a work is an object of envy only for real writers. Namely, such a work has achieved with divine ease what they, for all their efforts, will never achieve. (p.31)

The narrator or the author dubs this pain a bit later the *invisible angel of nostalgia* that *brushes aside the demons of irony*. Album and autobiography are the genuine genres of such amateur pain, which is endowed both with a universal, omnipresent status as well as with an ultimate subjectivity. This pain is also illustrated by the ambiguous genre of the primer, which is split between the naively blatant ideology of an imposed signified and the would-be radical innocence of an entirely empty signifier. In fact the pages that introduce the aesthetics of pain and authenticity are among the funniest, (self-) ironic and skillfully elaborate. With tongue in cheek they enlist the peculiar requirements for such an art of pain. It turns out it has to do with beauty and authenticity, with the beauty of truth, but also with the prosthesis of another language, be it the foreign language of English through which a girl shares the banal but intimate story of her just failed suicide (pp.34–35), be it the artificial language of the A grade essay whose contemplative-nostalgic tone “is transfixed by the precocious meditation on the leaves falling from the nearby tree and profound anxiety over the so-called transience of life” (p.33); be it the comparison between the literature of “stylistic tricks” and the one defined as “beautiful and authentic” (p.34).

Ugrešić is known for being a highly ironic as well as a pain-provoking author, her techniques recalling the authentic amateurism of the young couple who kiss like “‘amateurs’ imitating ... the film stars”. She names this “the pain of difference” and “the angel of nostalgia” and the sheer contradiction between the two expressions creates the field, where the contemplation over this kind of pain beyond aesthetics has to spread. Ugrešić’s irony seems to target proper professional writers (of Iliya Troyanov’s stripe) who pursue the effect of pain but who remain under the auspices of grand literature, genre and craft. But hers is also a self-irony, a warning that what she strives for is possibly a doomed effort because she is, after all, an all-too-professional writer whose pain is but a performed effect, a trick, a stunt.

Ugrešić’s novel is bound not only to go beyond the media politics of exile as a phenomenon exhausted by perceptions like loss, separation, solitude and nostalgia, but also beyond her own poetics of the album, autobiography and other forms of (re)collection. What kind of pain is this? Where does it come from? What is it that feeds the sense of pain, displaced yet nagging? Ugrešić often writes about exilic experience, hers and others’. However, in passages endowed with exceptional clarity and profound reflexivity she refrains from the notion of exile as an epitome of nostalgia, loss and privation and reconsiders it as an option, opportunity and optics. Her literature in fact elicits a pain, alternative to the one of nostalgia. Not only the all-pervasive irony but also the gains of the exile’s hazardous game are to be reckoned here. Exilic literature is capable of overcoming exile as a predicament evolving into a nomadic attitude.

A prerequisite for such an attitude is a demystification of the notion of home, a debasement of the economy of *oikos*. Exile draws upon the figure of nostalgia: craving to return home where home works as a figural extension of receptacle and thus enables a pre-symbolic pure communication and provides place and function. Thus *oikos* makes sense as a figure of incontestable order; it simultaneously delimits and discerns objects through their applications and humans through their roles, thus involving them in a productive communication. The figure of home appears authoritative even for Heidegger, as his notorious phrase about language as a home of being proves. So a subversion of *oikos* undertaken by exilic literature echoes overtones of a philosophical challenge. *The Museum of Unconditional*

Surrender gets its genuine power from the alternative experience of defying the economy of *oikos*.

Such defiance is never a direct attack. It is refracted through the structure of the novel, which relies on a particular organizational principle. This principle emerges in its purer form in the uneven shorter parts dedicated to the experience of Berlin as a city of emigrants and exiles, national museums and international artists, historical layers and flea markets. Those relatively equal and short pieces of writing alternate between personal observations, personal art projects and exchanges with people who never make it to the status of characters. All those brief pieces of writing in fact are never accomplished but rather halted, interrupted, cut off. In fact, with time they develop a certain wholeness and completeness, implanted in the pieces of writing through their recursive openness and inconclusiveness. This effect of indifference between totality and fragmentation elicits a peculiar reader response of *panting*, a word that tellingly comes from the Greek *phantasioun*, 'cause to imagine'. This panting, which stems from the self-exhaustion of any part in itself and from the alternative drive to continue because of a peculiar insatiability, produces the unique rhythm of Ugrešić's writing. The effect is that this rhythm conveys the special nomadic experience beyond exile and its grievances. In exilic writing it also produces the pulsation of indifference between persistence and distraction, between adherence and non-commitment, between completeness and inconclusiveness, and at last between indifference and love; a pulsation intentionally unable to provide a home to any meaning or message.

There is a tender curiosity, a distracted persistence and an oblivious reiteration in the way the narrator examines the post-exilic world. Hers is not just the sharp eye of a constant stranger trained to find its bearings in any environment. The descriptions given and the stories told project a gaze that is unable or unwilling to provide home to what is seen and described. Through Ugrešić's eye and writing, things remain somehow detached, displaced and dispatched, uprooted and orphaned, separated from their origin and history, and thus stripped of self-identity and inner integrity. Ugrešić's novel describes her exilic places in the estranging and defamiliarising way that implies and imposes their homelessness. Surprisingly the same turns out to be valid for the stories referring home. The detached, displaced

homelessness of the places and the things narrated appears therefore to be the inherent style of Ugrešić's writing. It crystallizes in a poetics shirking the economy of *oikos*. Exile provides both an optics and a perspective for shaking up the natural essentiality of home and home country. Exile is as much an experience of loss as it is a response to a certain ennui of *home*, a response to home's parochialism, provincialism, congestion with national and family 'values and truths' etc. Exile reveals home and its values as largely ideological and historical constructs. From the homesick perspective of exile home suddenly emerges as a sick home. Departure turns any return into arrival elsewhere. Leaving home thus remains forever marked by the sense of irretrievable loss but also by the perspective and prospect of turning the world outside into a 'home'-proxy. The exile becomes an *oikos*-promiscuous creature discovering the relative *proxy-mity* of home as such. Leaving home is replaced by an entering language as always already other and only as such a possible home for being.

What the exile discovers is the home as sick and the world outside and abroad as a dwelling space, or rather, time. True, the world can become home only as far as the very concept of home is reconsidered from the perspective of a resurrected and revitalized nomadic ethos of temporariness, interchangeability and multiplicity, i.e. the ethos of indifference. Such attribution of a new meaning to the concept of home does not pass without pain, though.

So let us go back to the pain induced by Ugrešić's writing. This pain feels like a sweet pain. Yet it is neither voluptuous nor lustful. Being intensively sweet, this pain is on the verge of leaving a heart *high-sorrowful and cloy'd*, to borrow from Keats. It makes it poignantly sweet, a bitter-sweet pain. Actually, I feel that (my) English falls short of describing this pain as the *nostrum* that Ugrešić's novel offers. Such a peculiar combination of tenderness and sadness has a special place in Christian Orthodoxy. Expressed with the word 'умиление' in different Slavic languages, it might be translated – poorly – with 'endearment'. *Умиление* actually sounds close to both 'humility' and 'humiliation', both of which come through Old French from Latin *humilis* 'low, lowly,' from *humus* 'ground.' *Умиление* or the Greek notion *Ελεούσα* – 'caressing' – is among the key visual hypostases of Our Lady and has to do with *милост*, i.e. 'mercy', and *έλεος* – compassion, sympathy, empathy. In Orthodox iconography this particular hypostasis depicts Virgin Mary

and the infant Jesus cheek to cheek, which symbolizes the annihilation of the distance between the human and the divine through the power of love. This proximity is also full of anticipation and preliminary knowledge about the inevitable separation that sacrifice involves, and more generally, it all applies to a sense of loss and death. In Greek art Ελεούσα has also been called Γλυκυφιλουσα, ‘sweet loving’ or ‘sweet kissing’. The key to grasping the pain, which Ugrešić’s exilic writing induces, lies in the element of compassion and of endearment to the point of mutual melting down; besides, this pain involves the awareness of inevitable separation and mutual loss; there is also the element of humility about one’s own human origin and limitations. Ugrešić’s endearing pain is full of *умиление* and humility, the latter grasped in its intimate, original relation to the soil, the fertile black earth of *humus*, of *чернозем*. In a word, what Ugrešić’s prose arouses as a reaction – emotional but also cognitive – is a peculiar pain that is also the *nostrum* she is offering to her readers.

It is perhaps but a coincidence that *nostrum*, coming from the Latin word for ‘our’, and *nostos* ‘returning home’ sound close enough to build a connection between *nostalgia* and *nostrum*; as if the pain (*algia*) for home might be treated only through the unreliable *nostrum* of endearment to and love for the world after and beyond home (*oikos*). Nostalgia and the pain of difference, which Ugrešić tries to reconcile, could be put together if only the pain for both *nostos* and *nostrum*, for returning home and returning back to one’s own past, finds its *nostrum* in the in-difference within a world taken as Home. Ugrešić’s pain is one that goes together with *умиление*, endearment towards a world outside and abroad, where the concepts of exile and home become paradoxically and productively in-different. If nostalgia, this Swiss illness, homesickness, Heimweh, is a psychoanalytically regressive reaction, Ugrešić’s pain in fact feeds on this nostalgia, be it a pain for home or for the past. But by thriving on it, it coins a substantially different pain, which is capable of incorporating both the daemon of irony and the angel of nostalgia.

Even before promoting her aesthetic manifesto Ugrešić paves the way for the already discussed crucial feature of her writing: her stubborn refraining from narrativity. It is known that since Aristotle the narrative, plot or *mythos* requires a conflict as the basis of action. In Ugrešić’s novel, however, there is neither action, nor conflict *per se*. There are many characters there but none of them is in fact

involved in any kind of action or conflict with the I-narrator. Even when Doty's story is told, the sneering irony and sweeping abjection come from aside and from an estranging distance, as if the characters were already separated by borders and other boundaries. In fact, not only conflict and action are missing from this novel – there is one more fundamental absence. It would be difficult to find today such a relatively long novel that can manage without the help of love. The two love moments are rather about its absence, if not impossibility. Yet the pain that is Ugrešić's nostrum reminds a phenomenon known as love pain or pangs of love. But how could one experience love pain when in the whole novel love, the conflict and the action of love, the happening between two persons are the most salient missing piece?

What seems to be missing in this novel and in nomadic literature in general is love as an interpersonal act, actuality and action, because it has been replaced by an omnipresent love without defined or stable objects. This new nomadic love is endearingly painful because the objects are inevitably abject, doomed to be abandoned insofar as they are visited. This nomadic love of endearment and pain actually dissolves the getting together and the separation within a post-exilic world. Love in exilic literature seems impossible and missing because this literature is all about love; a new love for a world that could never again be appropriated and possessed. Exile appears to be this love without possession, without ownership. This is not so much unwillingness to possess and to be possessed; it is rather the realized incapability, the emerging impossibility to have if one is to **become** in time rather than to **be** in space. This is a love beyond coveting and longing, beyond desire and will. Instead, this is a love for the one, which is neither the other nor the same, and thus defies both the logic of identity and the logic of difference by presenting them as indifferent. Such an endearing love pain of *умиление* offers its own logic of indifference *per se*, i.e. the exiles' apparent un-concern or nonchalance, their ostensible inability to become attached or to home in on their new places, is based on the general impossibility and on their personal inability to tell anymore the difference between home and exile, and by the same token, between Self and Other. Ugrešić's indifferent love for the world as a temporary abode treats the notions of home and exile with indifference and as in-different. Such an indifferent love for places and human beings grants genuine power to Ugrešić's writing. It presents it as an ultimate incarnation of a

literature that overcomes its cornerstone – exile itself – in a nomadic vision of indifference that loses both the sameness and the difference but gains the power of non-possession, of homelessness as a way towards dis-otherness. The logic of indifference is the one of non-belonging but also of the situational sheltering without cathexis.

Now we feel much closer to the message of the perception set up and induced by Ugrešić's nomadic literature. Its pain is not to be reduced to an emotive response; its sensual aspect develops its cognitive counterpoint. The sweet pain of endearment towards a post-home world crystallizes in the indifferent love which subverts simultaneously the identity-possessive self and the otherness-obsessive difference. Such an indifferent love overcomes those two poisonous love drives of possession of the other and of giving oneself over to the other. Indifferent love is a prerogative of the new nomad who (dis)misses the difference between home and abroad in the entirety of their meanings. It is exactly this indifferent love without returns and arrivals, without identity and otherness that makes possible the interactive co-operation between nostalgia and *the pain of difference*. It is this indifference that slips from both sameness and difference, which at the end of the day transforms exile into a nomadism which closes the power cycle of *oikos* as an instance of dividing us from them, ours from theirs, one's own from someone else's, family from strangers, here from there, home from abroad, the same from the other. Therefore the nomadic indifferent love is the only love that is not based on the imperialism of choice and segregation, of favouring and discrimination, of dialogue and exchange.

Thus exile is not about exile in itself. Exile becomes an entity only to the extent that it opens up for a nomadic attitude based on indifferent, indiscriminate love for a world structured as a journey rather than as a home, as time rather than as place. Although it certainly builds on the existentialist and Christian tradition of abandoning home, the nomadic upgrade goes beyond exile as a human condition. For many, exile remains in the grips of the usual suspects: loss, solitude, nostalgia, etc. But to the extent that it is fixed or displaced by the indifferent love for a world marked as an anticipated loss, it advances a new nomadic lifestyle and another set of values. The complex of *умиление* or *Ελεούσα* projects human and God as almost fused, without a distance in between. Yet this fusion remains a

self-subversive figure as it reveals itself as a rhetoricized wishful thinking. The propinquity and intimacy in fact discredit the fusion as always already lost. What is left after the initial separation and loss is a striving and a pursuit of an unattainable fusion, be it the one between man and God, man and the world, the self and the other. If home is a replacement for the initial loss of the receptacle, then exile is the initiation of the second birth. Thus the indifferent nomadic love for the world as the next stage of womb/home comes to fix both the initial loss and the secondary initiation of exile. Yet this love remains transfixed with the pain of *умиление/Ελεούσα*/endearment because of the realized impossibility of fusion with a world, which is entirely homeless and womb-less. Even endowed with the nomadic love which provides in-difference between the self and the world, the new nomad remains in the grips of his or her ironic pain because the world itself defies its perception as a home or as a womb. Thus nomadic love is an ironic sublimation of exile as another death rehearsal. Indifferent love is an individual proxy-revolution after the discredited revolutions of the masses. It does provide an ironic yet loving exit from the historically constructed and already obsolete culture of *oikos*.

Yet what is wrong with home? Where does the crisis of the *oikos* institution come from?

The interpersonal situation, whose home is home itself inverts the meanings of the verbs, overturns the words by imposing the language of imperatives. It presupposes an interpersonal situation under the auspices of the imperative mood, in which everybody talks to the others in orders while his or her actions are expressed by the requirements or requests of the others. Home, *oikos*, is the inherent space of the imperative as the cornerstone of communication among one's own people: be it the simple case of the wanting child, be it the perfidious asking or begging of the parents, siblings, spouses, friends... The economy of *oikos* is based on imperatives, on 'give!' in particular, which implies in fact the action of taking.

Abandoning home literally or rather metaphorically is the first step of breaking the spell of the imperatives' spurious naturalness. The initial replacement of the imperatives with questions, with interrogative sentences marks the first figural act of exile. Exile as a precondition for the nomadic indifferent love for the world cannot break the economy of taking and giving but is still able to replace the *oikos* economy of imperative imperialism with the alternative

economy of asking, of formulating questions. In Ugrešić's novel it is indicative that the four parts on exile are named in German – a language announced as unknown – with two of the parts formulated like questions: *Was is Kunst?* and *Wo bin ich?* The experience of exile appears to be all about asking and questioning, often without answers and without expectations, not least because imperatives appear to be obsolete or impossible, which means that the questions cannot be (mis)taken for imperatives. The nomadic condition of love questions things, places and people as indifferent from/for me and thus free from interest, free from the power of imperatives. Nomadic exile reveals home as a disenchanting imperative and the globe as an entity to inquire about.

Thus the nomadic indifferent love brings back the enchantment with a world disenchanting by the spell of imperatives. Being traditionally associated with the poignant experience of preliminary death and death rehearsal, being marked by the regressive stain of driving back home, to one's mother and motherland, exile in its artistic re-appropriation becomes a time machine. It helps overcome nostalgia as an epitome of death in favor of a new eventful love – the brand of nomadic indifferent love in the form of a permanent query, which means regaining human immortality in the womb/home of the globe. Nomadic literature is about the power of indifferent love to move as a time machine through the time layers in the global nomadic space. By subverting the power of imperatives indifferent love in fact dismisses the power of causality usurped to the utmost by the instance of questioning the instant. Indifferent love wraps in painful and ironic *умиление* the world. By loving indifferently the writing nomad unwraps the Globe in countless question marks. The Globe thus appears as the homeless womb. With its sweet painful panting of birthgiving.¹¹

Notes

¹ There is no shortage of ideological motivations in the recent interest in diasporic literature: the fresh blood donated by the ex-colonies has galvanized the cultural corpus of the mother countries, etc. On the other hand, exilic literatures in Eastern Europe have partly filled the gap after the discredited socialist literature. When it turned out that locker literature either does not exist (as in Bulgaria) or is unable to replace the would-be 'fake and phoney' literature of the communist past, the literary curricula ushered in 'emigrant literature'. Nevertheless, the historical and cultural dynamics that brought to the fore exilic literature deserves – and receives – substantial attention. Exilic literature is perhaps the only genuine phenomenon of the last decades

in the wake of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, class, etc. Thus, very much like its predecessors, exilic literature faces the paradox of choice: whether it prefers to be admitted to the established canon through its enlargement, or it would put up with the establishment of alternative canons, whose differentiation would be forever threatened by some level of ghettoization.

² For years Bulgarian critics at home, including myself, have abstained from treating as Bulgarian a literature written abroad by immigrants in foreign languages, since those writers opted for a new cultural affiliation, i. e. they do not belong to the national culture. However, it turned out that none of three internationally acclaimed Bulgarian writers – Kapka Kasabova, Dimitre Dinev and Iliya Troyanov – minds a victorious return to and recognition in their forsaken homeland. They have given up their initial abstention and have eagerly re-emerged to become instances in the national culture.

Yet it was hardly their own idea: two alternative projects to save literature compete today in Bulgaria. The first one relies on translating, promoting and selling abroad the recent outstanding Bulgarian production. So far, however, its international face has been outlined by a bunch of poets and writers who mostly owe their translations to personal connections with translators and publishers. A rampant example is the married couple Mirela Ivanova – Vladimir Zarev, who have achieved unsuitably representative status as Bulgarian writers in the German-speaking world.

The other strategy bets on ‘Bulgarians’ living abroad and writing in major languages, particularly if they occasionally accept and proclaim their Bulgarian descent, which usually happens when an award arises on the horizon. Writers like Tzveta Sofronieva, Milena Fučedžieva, Vladislav Todorov, Lubormir Kanov, Roumiana Zaharieva, Dimitar Inkiov, Assen Assenov, Zlatko Enev, Antoaneta Slavova, Nikolaj Atanassov have been working and writing abroad long enough to be almost forgotten. The recent upsurge of mutual interest apparently has to do with the proven literary success of the mentioned above ex-Bulgarians. Kapka Kassabova, Dimitre Dinev and Iliya Troyanov, known respectively in the East Pacific English and in the German worlds, have just been recognized as a chance for Bulgarian literature to overcome its anonymity. Bulgarian literature in general and its contemporary version in particular are perhaps the least known in the whole of Eastern Europe. After – unsuccessfully – we tried to attribute Bulgarianness to intellectuals like Tzvetan Todorov, or Julia Kristeva, or John Atanassov, the time has come for ‘our’ writers abroad to be summoned back.

³ As a minor literature on loss and violated rights exilic literature is a commissioned art. Although it is known that literature’s mimetic bond is massively overrated, the experience of exile provides a fertile soil for a typical literary cultivation. There is a hidden aesthetic ideology in the alleged or promoted correspondence between the human condition of exile and its counter-establishment articulation. On the market of democracy its critics and its outcasts are the most suitable dummies proving its potential for self-improvement. By translating marginal or subversive authors, and by envisaging this act as an agency for establishing a new European identity, the cultural and academic institutions in fact enter into – blindly or not – a structural collaboration with political power.

⁴ The debate being elaborated at length in authoritative Azade, Seyhan, 2001.

⁵ The hope that the trial of rupture, dispersion, fragmentation and “neither here, nor there” (non-)belonging would safely lead to another continuity, thus negotiating the new cultural identities of contemporary Europe, implies that the critical, subversive and thus heuristically productive potential of a postfeminist/postcolonial theory is meant to be sacrificed in the name of constituting a new Europeanness. It is both tempting and soothing to imagine such Europeanness as a lapidary version of the dispersed non-identity of immigrants and exiles, of diasporic and trans-national writers and artists. Yet it would be another theoretically forged utopia, straggling behind the arts, sciences, and businesses of a globalizing world. The perfume of sacrificial heroization of exilic literature may thus turn flat.

⁶ An element, act or figure of exile is, or should be, a general property or a prerequisite for any artistic creativity. Kristeva and others have suggested that going into language can be interpreted as a final act of banishment from the pre-linguistic spaces and practices of genuine communication, whose perfect and perhaps idealized model is the one within the mother's womb. Therefore, exile is a general human condition. Literature as the only discourse that simultaneously recognizes, performs and subverts the fundamental exile of human existence, and whose country of exile is again language itself, is a theoretical utopia which has not exhausted yet its heuristic potential. (See Kristeva, 1984; ‘82; ‘86; ‘91).

⁷ Perhaps this explains why exilic literature is particularly good at giving titles, at naming and nominating: it remains on the side of linguistic (un)translatability rather than on the side of mythos, i.e. of narrative universality. By crossing the border of the home country, the literary émigré strides from the world of things into the world of their multiple partial translations. This, according to Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator” in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968), is the only way to unveil the genuine pre-language before Babel through accumulation.

⁸ A paradigmatic Bulgarian writer of (1863–1897), known for his travelogue *Do Čikago i nazad* (To Chicago and Back, 1894) and his masterpiece *Bay Ganyo* (1896), an anecdotal narration about a Bulgarian touring Europe.

⁹ The Lisbon love affair is the most dubious among the *Six stories with the discreet motif of a departing angel*; it looks like a patch, like a foreign body in the novel's centre. It is either a random lapse into a more personal tone or just a cunning strategy, as the unexpected journalism with political overtones in the opening of the part suggests.

¹⁰ The dialogue of the reader simultaneously with the narrator and with her characters is a trade mark of exilic literature. Because of the ubiquitous pain, the narrator seems to be exiled also from the country of situational feelings and unmediated emotions. The craft of writing on exile requires the narrator to play the role of pure mediator between a reader and an experience.

¹¹ The text may well arouse suspicions that the suggested approach towards exilic and respectively immigrant and nomadic literature is based extensively and exceptionally on Ugrešić's novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, and therefore remains an outsider with regard to the contemporary debate on issues like exile, nostalgia, contemporary nomadism, etc. For example, it is clear that my disqualifying, or rather, *looking-for-alternative* attitude towards nostalgia should delineate its standing in terms of Svetlana Boym's recent classic (Boym 2001). Boym's perception of nostalgia as a historical and modern disease seems to be logical and understandable as she treats

nostalgia as another incarnation of counter-modern – or off-modern in her language – compensatory response to the deficiencies and exigencies of modernity. She also insists that nostalgia is still generally an incurable disease no matter how metaphorical the perspective.

My point, on the contrary, is that the nomadic response of indifferent love emerges as a medicine, or at least as a *nostrum* for the pain or for the drive of *nostos*. The nomadic attitude as it has been described is the main achievement I elicited from Ugrešić's writing. In her case, the nomadic response reaches the plane of a particular purity and density, which accounts for my devotion to her version of nomadic love.

In a recent publication, Svetlana Boym makes the following observation: "If in the 1980s artists dreamed of becoming their own curators and borrowed from the theorists, now the theorists dream of becoming artists. Disappointed with their own disciplinary specialization, they immigrate into each other's territory. The lateral move again. Neither backwards nor forwards, but sideways. Amateur's out takes are no longer excluded but placed side-by-side with the non-out takes. I don't know what to call them anymore, for there is little agreement these days on what these non-out takes are.

But the amateur's errands continue. An amateur, as Barthes understood it, is the one who constantly unlearns and loves, not possessively, but tenderly, inconstantly, desperately. Grateful for every transient epiphany, an amateur is not greedy." ("Nostalgic Technology: Notes for an Off-modern Manifesto" – <http://www.svetlanaboym.com/manifesto.htm>).

Well, Barthes' and Ugrešić's amateur seems to be in-different from our nomad full of painful endearment towards a globe deprived of drive for womb and home.

Bibliography

- Ugrešić, Dubravka. 1999. *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*. London: Phoenix. (*Musej bezuvjetnee predaje*. 1996. Beograd: Samizdat B92; Zagreb: Konzor, 2001–2002)
- Troyanov, Iliya. 1996. *Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall (The World is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner)*. Munich: Carl Hanser.
- Hančev, Veselin. 1966. 'Romansero za Hose Sanča' in: *Stihotvorenija (Poems)* Sofia: Bălgarski pisatel.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. 'The Task of the Translator' in: *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Boym, Svetlana, 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1986. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (tr. Dona Polan). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1986. 'Stabat Mater' in *The Kristeva Reader* (ed. Toril Moi). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves* (tr. Leon S. Roudiez). New York: Columbia University Press.

Seyhan, Azade. 2001. *Writing outside the Nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.