

MIRA MILADINOVIĆ ZALAZNIK – DEAN KOMEL
(Eds. | Hrsg.)

EUROPE AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONTEMPORARY WORLD
100 Years after the Great War

EUROPA AN DEN SCHEIDEWEGEN DER GEGENWÄRTIGEN WELT
100 Jahre nach dem Großen Krieg



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Europe at the Crossroads of Contemporary World
Europa an den Scheidewegen der gegenwärtigen Welt

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INSTITUTE NOVA REVIJA
FOR THE HUMANITIES

The work is published within the research program P6-0341, the research project J7-8283, and the infrastructure program I0-0036 executed by the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities (INR; Ljubljana, Slovenia), and financially supported by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS; Ljubljana, Slovenia).

Die Publikation erscheint im Rahmen des Forschungsprogramms P6-0341, Forschungsprojekts J7-8283 und Infrastrukturprogramms I0-0036 des Instituts Nova Revija für Humanwissenschaften (INR; Ljubljana, Slowenien), die von der Slowenischen Forschungsagentur (ARRS; Ljubljana, Slowenien) finanziell unterstützt werden.

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

316.7(4)(082)

EUROPE at the Crossroads of Contemporary World : 100 Years after the Great War ; Europa an den Scheidewegen der gegenwärtigen Welt : 100 Jahre nach dem Großen Krieg / Mira Miladinović Zalaznik and, Dean Komel (Eds., Hrsg.). - Ljubljana : Inštitut Nove revije, 2020. - (Zbirka Forum)

ISBN 978-961-7014-23-5
I. Miladinović Zalaznik, Mira
COBISS.SI-ID 33180675

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DRAGAN PROLE

Witness of the Future Dušan Vasiljev and the European Turning Points in 2018

Abstract: What is Europe? Certainly not a territory. Philosophically speaking, Europe is a specific kind of rationality that includes a unique dialogue with the past. The truth or falsehood of Europe depends on the vitality of maintaining that dialogue. Following that logic, we would like to reflect on our own time by means of dialogue with a tragic figure of Serbian inter-war poetry, Dušan Vasiljev. We will focus on some motifs of his poetry that could serve as a tool both for examining the effects of massive conflicts on European self-understanding, and for rethinking our capacities to face our contemporary challenges.

Keywords: post-war Europe, new forms, renewal, disaster, Dušan Vasiljev

The Enemy is the Radical Alien

The change brought forth by the Great War relies on the power of the new media, mainly posters. The poster marks the beginning of an extreme artistic style in which the audience permits an impudence that would be unthinkable in places we consider pure art.¹ Thanks to the boldness of its messages, the poster allowed public space to become a visual stage, in which the former neighbor was displayed as a mortal enemy or a radical alien. Warring sides were not displayed

1 Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte: Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main/Berlin: Ullstein, 1956), 100. (All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.)

in the posters as adversaries who played by the book, by the international conventions and customs of war. On the contrary, the opponent had to be turned into a radical, unreasonable, bloodthirsty alien, a wild beast keen on explicitly destroying the other side. While opponents have opposing goals and interests, and yet respect common norms and rules, enemies do not share and accept our values, but fight against the things we care deeply about, against the conceptual postulates on which we formulate our existence. When compared to the nineteenth-century liberal dream of gradually lessening and ending international conflicts, based on the assumption that wars are waged more and more “humanely, and that a person does not hate another person,”² the Great War presented an eponymous turning point. “Human” war became an oxymoron.

Propaganda conflicts were guided by the strategy of dehumanization, that is, the creation of disgust. Unlike hate, which always implies a certain respect for the other side and appears as the other side of love, through disgust the enemy is presented as sub-human, able to infect us, contaminate us, begrime us. The purpose of such propaganda was to create a general principle that the sub-human, the racially and culturally inferior do not deserve to be treated humanely. Especially among the troops, a determined belief needed to be created that conventions and international agreements only bound them if the opponent was of the same race and cultural level, but when the inferior came into play, such rules were no longer valid. Even though numerous institutes for racial research were founded for a scientifically based justification of colonial projects, the results of their research found an audience in the masses of the uneducated public and worked as the internal propaganda of fear.³ The logic which their work was based on during the Great War was mostly used within the European

2 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833), 429.

3 Ruben Philipp Wickenhäuser, *Rassenforschung Rassenkunde Rassenideologie: Eine wissenschaftshistorische Betrachtung der physischen Anthropologie zwischen Weimarer Republik und NS Zeit* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand Verlag, 2015), 119.

framework. After ignoring growing mistrust of external foreigners beyond European borders, the alien within them comes into play.

If ethics and politics cannot be conceived without a relation with the alien, then it is the key mission of war ideology to radicalize that alienness of the enemy as much as possible. This is, of course, not the alien in the sense of a romantic idea of the dignity of the unknown. It does not relate to the promise of higher subjectivity; instead, it is about the thesis of all three meanings of the alien for their unconditional pathologizing. If the aspects of the alien correlate to *place*, *possession*, and *kind*,⁴ then the propaganda logic of the Great War called for a final showdown with a hell of sorts, one which resides beyond the domestic, cultivated, and just world, one in which we can only meet a mean and uncivilized aggression that is armed to the teeth. Furthermore, that hell must be destroyed, as it is populated by a barbaric subhuman species who have no contact with “our” principles of humanization and high cultural achievements. It goes without saying that such a mixture of a cursed place, the basest instincts, and the most negative strangeness possible, marked as the ultimate evil, as lies and ugliness, is supposed to trigger disgust at the very mention of such beings.

In the root of all this we can recognize the logic and the aesthetic that worked on aestheticizing the call to enlist and participate in the Great War, that is the mobilization imperative *Serbien muss sterben*. The poster featuring this slogan presents the immaculately clean sleeve of a KuK (Austro-Hungarian army) officer from which a gargantuan hand appears. That hand forcefully and mercilessly strikes the head of a considerably smaller, hairy, bestial freak in dirty clothes, who holds in his right hand a primitive bomb with a fuse, and is dropping a kitchen knife from his left hand: “The enemy is the criminal, he is outside of the law. He is not justified, the war is.”⁵

4 Bernard Waldenfels, *Topographie des Fremden*, Vol. 1 of *Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 20.

5 Norbert Bolz, “Warum es keine Kriege mehr gibt,” in *Krieg und Kunst*, ed. Bazon Brock and Gerlinde Koschnik (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 151.

The Hidden Humanity

The experiences of European turning points a hundred years after the end of the Great War can be presented through a controversial, but extremely interesting and tragic persona of the Serbian postwar poetic scene. The poetic motifs of Dušan Vasiljev will be our guiding light for the virtual confrontation of the returnees from the Great War with the challenges we face today. Almost at the end of the war, an 18-year-old boy joins the Austro-Hungarian army deliberately. As a volunteer, Vasiljev participates in the battles on the Italian front, which were especially massive and intensive during the offensive on the Piave River. Unlike many of his countrymen, Dušan did not try to find a way to join the Serbian army on the remote Thessaloniki front. It is difficult to say if this was a matter of civil loyalty, or of his discomfort when considering taking up arms against his home country. He also did not join the disappointed returnees from the eastern front, who in the tens of thousands deserted from the KuK army and formed the Green Cadres, in hopes that through robbing the rich they could build a more just and better world.

The expressionism of this gifted poet is marked by existential paradoxes: voluntary participation in the Great War on the side of the Monarchy whose mortal enemies were Dušan's kinsmen south of the Sava and Danube river; the shocking violence he had to endure from his countrymen when, after the war, he appeared in his KuK uniform (the most ceremonial piece of clothing he owned); the fatal disease he brought from the front that ended his life at the mere age of 24; and the irreconcilable gap between the returnees from the war and their fellow citizens who spent the war at their homes. The unusual life story of this young man stems from an inexplicable force which drove him to enlist and participate in the Great War, which he could not resist—"An adventurer I am not / like Manfred or Peer Gynt / but I had to ... had to get away ... /..... .." (*Silom [By force]*).⁶

6 Dušan Vasiljev, *Pesme [Poems]*, ed. J. Zivlak (Sremski Karlovci: Kairos, 2000), 32.

This unusual line is empty and consists mainly of dots. It is as if it embodies the necessity of life's constellation, which we cannot resist, but which fundamentally determines our lives. Such a necessity is usually referred to as destiny. Research about Southeastern Europe emphasizes that it is characteristic of this region to remove any sort of transcendence from destiny, and that it is displayed as something of this world; "in this part of Europe, destiny is almost something mundane."⁷

Still, Vasiljev does not see destiny in the everyday, in the inevitable entanglement in the webs of power. From his perspective, destiny is not the result of an inner constellation of the powerful and powerless, the privileged and subjugated. On the contrary, destiny appears in the form of an irresistible call to the present, announcing the permanent exit from the present, ordinary, and everyday. Sensing the epochal event after which neither he nor the world would ever be the same again, was far more enticing for Vasiljev than the question on which side he would fight and who his adversary would be. It seems as if his example is just one of many who witnessed the need to "depart from themselves."⁸ The modern search for subjectivity, in the spirit of Emanuel Levinas, rests on the idea of a fracture, a break, a radical change, of a transcendence that is unimaginable if we do not escape, do not leave the current being.

The young poet felt deeply that the thing he wanted to write about required means and forms which were not known or available to the poetry of his era. The world of bare, raw, and dehumanized human experiences and the world the poet builds with his lines are so heterogeneous that, at first, the poet is left with nothing but an attempt to try and figure out the alienness of the world by recognizing and illuminating his own situation. On the other hand, it does not allow him to believe in a harmonious symbiosis of the poet and his subject matter. This means that modern poets unwillingly give in to the absenteeism

7 Paul Scheffer, "The Quest for Eternal Peace in Europe," in *The Time is Out of Joint: Perceptions of Europe*, ed. S. Austen, 45–53 (Amsterdam: Felix Meritis, 1998), 49.

8 Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'évasion* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1998), 98.

of a truce, a permanent discord, and discrepancy. Writing poetry no longer refers to creating harmony, but an announcement and presentation of existing discords, conflicts, and ambiguities. This extraordinary “privilege,” to enter deep into the empty space that separates the poetic world from the mundane, belonged, without doubt, to the veterans of the Great War. The key motif that Dušan Vasiljev brings is tied neither to the mass killings, to the pain and suffering of millions, nor to the monstrous power of means of destruction created by the extreme rationality of the technologically advanced civilization. Vasiljev is not fascinated with the poisons, powerful machine guns, or the enormous cannons, tanks, and zeppelins—of all the new things he saw on the battlegrounds, in his mind, it was the barbed wire that left the principal impression. This is stated in many brilliant verses and lines: “The view is grey from barbed wire”; “Our paths are now merged in misery and pain / and the barbed wires cut our view of the sky / The humans in us are deeply deeply hidden / they cannot / cannot / come back” (*Žice [Barbed Wire]*).⁹

It is as if the barbed wire for Vasiljev is not laid down horizontally, but stands vertically. It fills the perspective of the observer, by placing itself between him and reality. It denies access, both inner and outer. To a man surrounded by barbed wire, the sky—as the archetypal symbol of paradise, peace, the true symbol of living—remains out of reach and incomprehensible. Furthermore, the barbed wire obstructs the view of the sky, which means that it significantly reduces the horizon of the visible and thinkable. The subject in the barbed wire cannot see the sky. It has been taken away from him and reduced to the level of imagining, fantasizing. Even if he considers looking up at the sky, his gaze will necessarily remain unfulfilled, empty, purely intentional, with no contact with the object. On the other hand, the presence of barbed wire is equal to the cancellation of humanity. The human remains suppressed, is not allowed to appear and display himself, to become visible and tangible, in the interhuman, mundane reality.

9 Vasiljev, *Pesme*, 80.

The experience of barbed wire is not comparable to trauma in the normal sense of the word. Vasiljev is not a kind soul contaminated by destruction, neither is his poetry comparable with the longing for a more beautiful and better world. On the contrary, there is but a trace of remorse that the warring storm did not bypass him. In the end, this volunteer, even after the war, feels that in it he found the most eloquent, most educational event of his time. "I am not sorry that I waded in blood up to my knees, / or that I have survived the red years of slaughter. / Yet because of this holy pilgrimage / ruin has been heaped upon me" (*Čovek peva posle rata [A man sings after the war]*).¹⁰

The poet would be shocked today if he were to find an infinite sting of barbed wire north of his hometown of Kikinda in 2018. It is quite close to the border with Hungary, which fenced itself off from its southern neighbors. How would Vasiljev respond to the story of the order of a massive amount of barbed wire which was rejected by the German manufacturer with the response that their wire was made for animals, and not humans? Unlike his contemporary, Franz Kafka, who also died in 1924, for Dušan the animals no longer serve the purpose of literary metamorphosis and research into the human condition. It appears as if the modern statesmen are raising the virtue hierarchy which Kafka tried to tear down, or at least interrupt, which is founded on the primacy of the human, high above the animals. The fence intended for animals is placed as the border between the true "familiar" people and the unwanted aliens who are *a priori* denied humanity. It is more probable that the step away from the norm is literal here, and that all the people who wanted to enter Hungary are reduced to animals because the treatment they receive is reduced to a restraining order. Such a treatment is a characteristic of man's behavior toward wild and feral beasts. The fact that the fencing of an entire nation is directed against elemen-

10 Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, eds., *Serbian Poetry from the Beginnings to the Present* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), 232.

tary European values, against the very basis of the Union, which is non-discrimination and freedom of movement, probably does not disturb all those civilians who, acting as governmental guard dogs, are currently patrolling that fence and are helping the elements of the state to protect the first line of defense of “Fortress Europe” against the unwanted alien scourge.

On the other hand, the poet would probably be delighted by the idea and the reality of a Europe with no borders, and the target of his excursions would most definitely be the border between Austria and Italy, on which there are a couple of monuments instead of the former front, but no one is asking for passports. However, Vasiljev would not find the association of barbed wire and the borders of Europe confusing. The integration of Europe in the conflict with the exterior other would remind the poet of the customs of his countrymen, who would unite, even when fighting amongst themselves, against the alien, especially if that alien appeared hostile and aggressive. He would recall Fichte who, after the Great Turkish War (whose actions affected his province as well, and was ended with the first signing of a peace treaty of European powers and the Ottoman Empire in Sremski Karlovci in 1699), said that the Turkish advance into Europe was seminal to the idea that “Christians are but one state and have one interest.”¹¹

Vasiljev would probably try to connect the lost opportunity for uniting Europe with different terms and notions concerning Europe which were prevalent in his surroundings. On one hand, Europe was there as a cultural term, with which he felt an undivided unity. If Europe is indivisible as a cultural area and is determined and united, as a political area it is deeply divided. On one side, we have the politics of the French revolution and the Paris Commune, to which the nations which had been subjugated for centuries likened themselves. Such European politics, as a symbol of fighting for freedom and equality,

11 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, ed. J. H. Fichte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), 197.

was a role model and base to Slavic peoples who had, until recently and apart from Poland, all chosen liberal ideologies, and with them, state flags in the colors of the tricolor. On the other end of the spectrum, we have the *Realpolitik* of the great European powers which, like Great Britain, kept the dying Ottoman Empire alive, and thereby delayed the South Slavs' dream of final liberation. Such politics was seen as incorrect, oversimplified, and ruthless by the romantics, like Jovan Jovanović Zmaj and Đura Jakšić. Its pinnacle Vasiljev would have recognized in the experiences of the Great War. It embodied the exact opposites of the ideas of the French revolution—inequality, disunity, and the absence of freedom. Put into verse, such politics enshrines on all sides the inherited image of the bloodthirsty figure which lurks beyond the Slavic south—"We are all big Turks / in this slaughter" (*U kolibama smrti [In the Huts of Death]*).¹²

The Burden of the Past and the Deconstruction of the Romantic Path

Whilst trying to offer a response to the rift between Europe as a cultural term and as a political term, Dušan Vasiljev unifies the smothered hope and the promise of a new, unknown poetics, but a poetics completely up to its task: "Other forms would have saved us" (Prologue [*Prologue*]).¹³ Salvation in form can be found only by a poet who nurtures a deep trust in the power of the arts to provide an exit from the contradictions of the world he inhabits, that is, from the dead ends in which his era is entangled. A close encounter of the poetic and the everyday world did not seem like a plausible utopia to Vasiljev. Even though the postwar idea of salvation expressed a persistent, tough human nostalgia for a better world, and this "category of collective experience was lived essentially in the waiting mode,"¹⁴ Vasiljev

12 Holton and Mihailovich, *Serbian Poetry*, 232–3.

13 Vasiljev, *Pesme*, 5.

14 Stéphane Mosès, *L'ange de l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 75.

saw no other available routes one could take to reach salvation. “The clouds offer no salvation, / nor the hearts of men / we shiver in horror” (*Naraštaji [Generations]*)¹⁵.

The same expressionistic impotence followed transcendence being delegitimized as a pure Fata Morgana, and the sphere of social immanence being likened to the triumph of material values. The crucial guidelines for acting and thinking lost their human visage by morphing into an abstraction of money and possessions. The poet did not find his postwar world to be one of physical desolation and ruins, as his Banat home was spared, but he did face enormous challenges of spiritual desolation, embodied in the rule of the sacrosanct “system of needs.” The order of “paths” the poet finds does not imply that it will soon be replaced by something else. After a century, the material order only solidified its rule. Therefore, Vasiljev would probably even today mourn the display of history as a barren, bleak path on which nothing appears, and nothing new can appear, maybe because those who cross it have exhausted all ideas of walking. History without history is a necessary correlate of the display of the subject deprived of subjectivity: “Joy of birthing new worlds thinks us / Fills the paths of bushes and barren cliffs / ... / we are fed up with everything: god, glory and symbols!” (*Radost smeha [Joy of laughter]*)¹⁶.

The privileged romantic motif of the path acquires completely different connotations when perceived by the returnees. Someone who saw the path from the perspective of a path to war is unable to connect the journey with the magic of their own metamorphosis. What happens to the path when it is reduced to an eternal farewell, to loss, to dying? The powerful vision of the path as enriching to life, as eternally important emotionally, and as a spiritual process that never truly ends, ended up in nightmarish, abominable memories. The romantic idea of the path offered a distance from the everyday, a secluded dream in which the ritual dynamic of the crossing resides as well. The path from the ex-

15 Vasiljev, *Pesme*, 71.

16 Ibid., 19.

isting takes the romantic to the desired, given, and expected. It is not surprising that the path once held the promise of initiation, of maturing, and reaching higher forms of humanness by knowing and appropriating (thus far unknown) artistic and spiritual contents.

However, the romantic announcements of the completed man were completely dismantled by the hell of the war and postwar trauma. Therefore, from the perspective that dominated after the Great War, the romantic distinction between the *inner voyage*, for which we do not need to change our residence, and the personal odyssey into foreign worlds and unknown languages, appeared devalued and meaningless. One thing is for certain: *the path was no longer associated with the possibility of human accomplishment or fulfillment*. If it is impossible to remove the experience of change from the image of the path, that is, a certain morphing though the shift from one place to another, then it is no longer a change for the better.

For Vasiljev, the path is no longer a medium of the precious promise of a future, far happier and more humane existence. Instead of opening the windows into the future, to enable the fresh air to come surging in, the path represents the embodiment of a tiresome burden from the past, which suffocates the poet and which he can in no way get rid of. As a merger of pain and misery, the path takes us nowhere; it no longer directs us to the unknown, shadowy lands that are just beyond that hill. The path no longer talks of what is before us, but of what stands right behind us, which shadows us and is with us even when we do not want to be aware of it. The path of Vasiljev does not lead forward but backward, testifying to the trauma of the entire world which left its mark on the trauma of humanity. From there, the path can be nothing but an image of regress, an unwanted change that pulls the entire collective backwards, and marks the reversible historical flow to the worse: "We thought we're going forward / but every step was to return" (*Naraštaji [Generations]*).¹⁷

17 Ibid., 70.

The Returnee and the Migrant: Aliens without History

The experience of the war returnees poses the unusually difficult challenge of adaptation. In the poetry of Dušan Vasiljev, the question of the return relates to both the dramatic, radical change in scenery in which the war chaos and death make way for the prose of the everyday, and to the meeting of the war-traumatized returnee and his countryman, who found out about the war atrocities and killings from the safety of his warm home. Instead of the return to one's homeland bringing much desired solace and remedy for the wounds caused by war, the scenery of the return bears witness to effects opposite to those that were expected. The war-born trauma is joined by another trauma, caused by the misunderstanding of those the returnee initially believes to be confidential, familiar, known, and close. The alien is the one without history, of whose personal history we know nothing, as he was not a part of our life world. The war returnees and modern-day migrants share that kind of alienness, which creates a gap in relation to the domiciled population.

The heterogeneous registers of experience create a distance which unconditionally must be surpassed to be able to talk about closeness again. The meeting of the returnee with former acquaintances becomes a trial in which the test of mutual trust is the subject. It is no longer measured by mutual memories or former friendships, but by what the returnee brings with him as a war memory:

This discrepancy between the uniqueness and decisive importance that the absent one attributes to his experiences and their pseudo-typification by the people at home, who impute to them a pseudo-relevance, is one of the biggest obstacles to mutual re-establishment of the disrupted we-relations.¹⁸

The returnee represents a sting in the body of his former community. His traumas are mostly experienced as unwanted ballast, and his ex-

18 Alfred Schütz, "The Homecomer," in *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, ed. A. Brodersen, 106–19 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1976), 114.

periences as completely irrelevant for the life conditions of a civilian. Those traumatized by war and those untouched by war live in experience registers that do not overlap. They do not speak the same language. Because of that, Vasiljev says to all the war veterans: “for us only the smile of pity ripens” (*Naraštaji [Generations]*)¹⁹. From the perspective of those who remain, beyond the war, the returnee overstates the significance of his experiences, as those experiences in everyday life do not appear neither appealing nor useful. However dramatic, the experiences of the migrants might be—as they are, by default—likened to one of many already known and well-learned lessons about the dark sides of humanity. That way they are neutralized, defaced, and irrelevant. Like the returnees, the migrants are often classified under the name of unfortunate human destiny, worthy only of pity and nothing else. Extraordinary experiences of borderline human situations are thus normalized. The crucial issue with normalization is that it “creates what it normalizes.”²⁰ Whether we are talking about the migrant or a returnee, we are talking of a social outcast, persons whose crucial personal experiences are not relevant to the community they are a part of.

What is crucial for the returnee and the migrant, the extraordinary experiences that have a formative role in the shaping of life as a whole—and not only a personal, individual one, but in the future of the entire collective—is for the familiar, civilian populace a trivial, unworthy, and meaningless string of unfortunate events with no general significance. The attempt of the returnee to generalize his experience of the war in the collective framework inevitably clashes with the procedures of normalization: “And we believe that all that / was nothing but a joke / of a drunken, wild Carnival, / that sailed away in blood and so / all is fine now” (*Nemoć [Helplessness]*).²¹

19 Vasiljev, *Pesme*, 71.

20 Bernard Waldenfels, *Grenzen der Normalisierung: Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 2* (Frankfurt am/M: Suhrkamp, 1998), 11.

21 Vasiljev, *Pesme*, 65.

Consoled Tourist and Disturbed Refugee

Remembering the war or the reason for migration can hardly be conciliated with the needs of everyday life. These two positions are conflicted and threaten each other, or even cancel each other out. Instead of allowing their uneasy presence and giving the leading role to the unpleasant sting of the war witness, civilians rather try to go back to normal, nurturing as a consequence the idea that war is nothing but a meaningless, terrible excess which came and went. The returnee is above all irritated by the leveling, the unjust, and violent change of the extraordinarily significant revelation into meaningless and pointless fornication: "Truth holy and just / we buried for the hundredth time / and gave away to oblivion / that which once was" (*Nemoć [Helplessness]*).²²

The integration of the returnee is successful only when he stops emphasizing his wartime existential experiences and when he completely turns towards the trivial everyday of his community. For this to happen the war veteran must become a consumer. Recognition can come only when he turns to consuming. Nicely dressed, shaved, and washed, the veteran becomes one of us. In a nice, elegant suit, Vasiljev most certainly would not have been beaten, and his clothes would not have been ripped. However, the image of migrants in nice suits would not be able to lessen their alienness. Simply put, the migrant in a nice suit is an illegal, economic migrant who came to bask in our common wealth. Therefore, he is unwanted, while the migrant in rags, who owns nothing, and who lost everything in the war, represents the ideal typical opposite of the ideal tourist. The tourist "spends, smiles, admires, and leaves", while the migrant comes to stay and become a part of our community: "The tourist is the benevolent foreigner. [...] He makes us connected to the larger world, without imposing its problems on us. In contrast, the refugee, who could have been yesterday's tourist, is the symbol of the threatening nature of globalization. He comes bringing with him all the misery and trouble of the larger

22 Ibid., 65.

world.”²³ Therefore, it is not unusual that the crucial discussion in Germany, which took in the most migrants, was about establishing the upper limit. When we are doing something which is hard, and we are doing it unwillingly, the only salvation is quantification. Tedious work must be limited, since it is easier to do it when you know when it will end.

In the case of migrants, establishing the upper limit would mean that people are divided into those who have been saved, who deserve to be saved, and those who are not worthy of help, just because the quotas are full.²⁴ In such circumstances, Dušan Vasiljev would yell with Rilke and the French theater writer Marie Lenéru: “Wehe denen, die getröstet sind [woe to those who are consoled],”²⁵ as every form of consolation is nothing but the hiding of the life difficulties which burden modern Europe. After the Christian meaning of the term *consolatio* which saw in the Holy Spirit the entity providing solace to the believers, the secularized version of consolation requires strength and confidence which gives the consoled man the help he needs to persist through all existential threats: “One who is consoled has trust that within this world forces arise [...] which convince him that the turn of events in the end must be good, independent of what he alone can do through his own powers.”²⁶ The hopeless returnee would today repeat his verse “other forms would have saved us,” calling for a responsive relation with the phenomena we face. They ask Europe for a creative response which we give only when we no longer rely on what we have, but on what we do not have, which does not fall under the spec-

23 Ivan Krastev, “Utopian Dreams of Life Beyond the Border,” *IWM Post* 117 (Spring/Summer 2016), 4 (<https://www.iwm.at/publications/iwmpost/iwmpost-archive/iwmpost-117/>).

24 Bernhard Waldenfels, “Flüchtlinge als Gäste in Not,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 65, no. 1 (February 2017): 89–105.

25 Letter from Rainer Maria Rilke to the Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy in Chateau de Muzot sur Sierre, 6. January 1923. Quoted from: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe. Zweiter Band. 1914 bis 1926* (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1950), 375.

26 Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Neue Geborgenheit: Das Problem einer Überwindung des Existentialismus* (Stuttgart/Köln: W. Kohlhammer, 1955), 57.

trum of known and proven reactions. A witness of the future, Dušan Vasiljev, would encourage us to take on such an endeavor.

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EUROPE AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONTEMPORARY WORLD
100 Years after the Great War

EUROPA AN DEN SCHEIDEWEGEN DER GEGENWÄRTIGEN WELT
100 Jahre nach dem Großen Krieg

Edited by: | Herausgegeben von:

Mira Miladinović Zalaznik and | und Dean Komel

Scientific review: | Wissenschaftliche Rezension:

Prof. Dr. Dr. Holger Zaborowski (University of Erfurt | Universität
Erfurt; Germany | Deutschland)

ao. Prof. Dr. Virgilio Cesarone (University of Chieti and Pescara |
Universität Chieti –Pescara; Italy | Italien)

Proofreading: | Korrekturlesen:

Andrej Božič, Mira Miladinović Zalaznik, Christian Moe

Design and layout: | Gestaltung und Umbruch:

Žiga Stopar

Cover image: | Umschlagabbildung:

© **Vecteezy**

Print: | Druck:

PRIMITUS d.o.o.

Publisher: | Verlag:

Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko
www.institut-nr.si; institut@nova-revija.si

Price: | Preis:

28 EUR

Ljubljana 2020

INR

INSTITUTE NOVA RENCANA
FOR THE HUMANITIES

ISBN 978-961-7014-23-5



9 789617 014235