

MARGOT, MEMOIRS OF AN UNHAPPY QUEEN

text and music by Goran Bregovic

translation into English: Maria Rankov in complicity with David Johnson

(A room, day. On stage there is a wooden or wicker chest containing some clothes – some items hanging out, others strewn on stage. Enter a young woman in deep mourning with a travel bag in one hand, an open book in the other. She speaks addressing the book. During the concert while she speaks the monologues, the actress packs clothes into the travel bag.)

Ivo Andric... "A Letter from 1920". Hey! a letter from 1920! '920 and our own lives are in it ...

(reads)

My dear old friend (...) da-da-da... da-da-da... Yes, Bosnia is a country of hatred...

... your love demands little, but your hatred is easily spurred into action. And you love your homeland, you love it passionately, but in three or four different ways which exclude each other and often come to blows, and hate each other to death...

... In a Maupassant story there is a Dionysiac description of spring which ends with the remark that on such days, there should be a warning posted on every corner: "Citoyen Français! Spring is here - beware of love!" Perhaps in Bosnia men should be warned at every step in their every thought and their every feeling, even the most elevated, to beware of hatred - of innate, unconscious, endemic hatred. Because this poor, backward country, in which four different faiths live cheek by jowl, needs four times as much love, mutual understanding and tolerance as other countries.

...I have thought this over and over, especially in the last few months, when I was still struggling against my decision to leave Bosnia for ever. Of course a man obsessed with such thoughts cannot sleep well, and I would lie in front of an open window in the room where I was born, while the sound of the Milyacka alternated with the rustling of the leaves in the early autumn wind.

Whoever lies awake at night in Sarajevo hears the voices of the Sarajevo night. The clock on the Catholic cathedral strikes the hour with weighty confidence: 2 a.m. More than a minute passes (to be exact, seventy-five seconds - I counted) and only then with a somewhat weaker, but piercing sound does the Orthodox church announce the hour, and chime its own 2 a.m. A moment later the tower clock on the Bey's mosque strikes the hour in a hoarse, faraway voice, and it strikes 11 hours, ghostly Turkish hours, by the strange calculation of distant and alien parts of the world. The Jews have no clock to sound their hour, so God alone knows what time it is for them by the Sephardic reckoning or the Ashkenazy. Thus at night, while everyone is sleeping, division keeps vigil in the counting of the late, small hours, and separates these sleeping people who, awake, rejoice and mourn, feast and fast by four different and antagonistic calendars, and send all their prayers and wishes to one heaven in

four different ecclesiastical languages. And this difference, sometimes visible and open, sometimes invisible and hidden, is always similar to hatred, and often completely identical with it.

...And so – one of those autumn nights, while listening to the strange calls of those varied and dissonant towers of Sarajevo, I concluded that I cannot stay in my second fatherland Bosnia, that I must not stay here. I am not naïve enough to roam the world searching for a town where there is no hate. No, I only need a place where I will be able to live and work. Here, I could not do that. With a mocking, perhaps condescending smile – you will repeat your opinion about my flight from Bosnia. This letter will not have the power to explain and justify my action, but it seems that there are circumstances in life where the ancient Latin rule applies: Non est salus nisi in fuga. (Flight is the only refuge). And I beg you to believe only this: I am not running away from my human duty, I am running away in order to accomplish it completely and without hindrance. To you and to our Bosnia for the new life of the people and of the nation, I wish you good luck!

Yours, M.L.

(she closes the book)

This is the last book in this house, the house of Chief Commander General and his wife, professor of French literature... currently in hospital. Truth be told, my mother is mad and she's in a madhouse but one mustn't say that about a general's wife. Something woke up my father around two in the morning - that was last week. Mum was standing over him. Eyes closed, motionless, with an axe in her raised hands, praying. Dad's aids de camp took her to the madhouse but they couldn't take the axe from her. She went to the loony-bin with the axe.

This book... in fact these last remains of the book - I rolled joints with the rest - is all that's left. Only this story that I read over and over each day... I wish this story could outlive this war. This is the fourth year of joints, fourth year of war...

I hate war, I hate war, I hate war... You hear that General, Sir, you hear me? I HATE your war... your daughter, daughter of the most powerful general, hates war. Daughter of a general, lord of war, master of life and death... I hate the war. I HATE it General, Sir. Look at me, your only daughter, your 'princess' your 'ladybird', your 'little flower', your 'all in the world' is looking for a piece of paper to roll a joint. Your war is too long daddy, much too long... this is the fourth year. And you absolutely had to send my husband, my only sweet husband to that front of yours... No exceptions for you... "everyone join the army, everyone to the front..." Couldn't there be a small exception? Just one, a small one? What's the use of rising so high in life, the rank of a general, if not to make an arrangement with life to make an exception for you... Biiig general of a small nation... because small nations need big generals – hm, that reminds me of a poem I like...

« [Small nations need big poets](#)

small actors waste grand gestures
small husbands need bigger wives
small theatres play the greatest epics
small people order big cars
small songs demand the grandest voices
small nations need only big poets
the vanquished sing heroic songs
while the victors remain discretely silent.»

Arsen Dedic

... My sweet husband... this was his favourite dress... he used to call it 'your little lilac dress'. He used to tell me to put it on whenever I felt like crying and... it would go away... because someone whom lilac suits so well can't possibly cry. And that lilac coloured dress always smelled of him... however much perfume I put on, it still smelled of him. ... My sweet husband ... You sent him to the front line and that's from where he was returned... the priests just stuffed some chopped meat into the earth... and put a medal on top. No more husband... because that medal, that meat, that was not my husband. My husband had big good-smelling hands that I used to put over my ears so as not to hear your war, or your shooting or your heroic songs...

I don't know if some other war would suit me better, I doubt it... but this one... in your war I have already lost, general, sir! ... in this war my victory was not planned... in this war there will be no victor – not the Orthodox, not the Catholics, not the Muslims... who then? Well I'll tell you general, Sir ... it won't be « the Lions » as you say, but vultures... vultures, smugglers and mafia... because when oil flows through from Bulgaria, Marlboro from Turkey, coffee from Austria, Pampers from Italy, whores from Ukraine, Tampax from Slovenia... vultures' money does what no-one else can. It opens fronts, stops artillery fire, snipers take a break: heroin from Albania is passing through! ...aaah HEROIN... Here no one smokes hash any more, you roll a joint with heroin – heroin's easier to come by than a sandwich! Aaaaah-buuut – you can't find any Rizla paper – this thin, fine paper for rolling joints... that's nowhere to be found. Now thaaat, this Rizla, honourable smugglers, both ours on our side and the ones over there, choose not to smuggle in this war... Why?... Eh, well, that we don't know... This is the fourth year of war – I've rolled all of mum's poetry collections... so what now? Those on the other side have probably already smoked the few books they had... They have probably already all switched to the needle... I can't shoot up... I tried, it hurts...

Is it possible that the bible is the only book left to read in this house? O forgive me Lord, I'll only take this first page, just this one...

Wait, what is this?... This is my mother's handwriting... These are only the covers of the Bible...

(she crosses herself and takes out a Bible hidden somewhere on stage).

MEMOIRS OF AN UNHAPPY QUEEN

I begin this diary this day of May 5 1570 because I met him. Today. He said to me: "I admire you, Marguerite de Valois". Intonation... basso profundo... what a man.

He recited Ronsard's verses while we danced

« Amour me tue, et si je ne veux dire
Le plaisant mal que ce m'est de mourir :
Tant j'ai grand peur, qu'on veuille secourir
Le mal, par qui doucement je soupire.

Il est bien vrai, que ma langueur désire
Qu'avec le temps je me puisse guérir :
Mais je ne veux ma dame requérir
Pour ma santé : tant me plaît mon martyre.
Tais-toi langueur je sens venir le jour,
Que ma maîtresse, après si long séjour,
Voyant le soin qui ronge ma pensée,

Toute une nuit, folâtement m'ayant
Entre ses bras, prodigue, ira payant
Les intérêts de ma peine avancée. »

He will be my husband. He will be the father of my children. Father to little princes and princesses. This is the kind of father my children need. He looks so handsome in that shimmering costume, with those shiny medals... A man... Man that makes manly decisions. I still don't know whether I like him or if I like myself because he likes me... but I suppose that is normal... I don't know much about him, only from gossip. That woman they call his lover is beautiful... but who knows what's true... here it's all gossip, the minute one turns one's back.... I'm not all innocence either... Objectively, no... but what was doesn't count. That was mostly, as merchants would say: "big turn-over – little gain"... Now this is something different...

(August 18 1572)

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players"

My wedding, a sunny day, a perfect day for a wedding... as if dear God sent us his good wishes... bells ringing... bells ringing... immense crowd... Henry de Navarre,

do you take Marguerite de Valois to be your lawful wedded wife, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health till death do you part... basso profundo : « I do » Marguerite de Valois, do you take Henry de Navarre to be your lawful wedded husband, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do you part... My God, what dress I wore... off-white... a little tinge of lilac... with pearls and laces... he - all slick and handsome... what a sight... Notre Dame... organ... gloriaaaaaa...

(December 4 1574) Today he went hunting wild boar. Hunting gear jingled, dogs panted impatiently. A sight for a mantelpiece painting: "Men Hunting". I stood by the window and watched them leave... My husband leading xay, upright, gaze into the distance, as if he could see something that others don't see. When the barking subsided I remained at the window listening to the first sleepy cocks, thinking "Thank you Lord, I am a fortunate woman". That evening they brought him bleeding. The boar ripped his stomach open. They struggled like hell to kill the animal before it killed my husband. He lay on my bed, helpless, burning with fever. He stayed here for a week, nursed by my hand. And I thought "I thank thee Lord for this week in which you let him be only mine".

(October 22 1575) I am pregnant. Again. A prince or a princess my Lord? It would be good if it were a princess. We already have an heir. I just hope all goes smoothly. (she hums a lullaby) Oh Lord, I'm already singing lullabies to her... it will be a girl. I went to see a fortune-teller. She said: a girl, she'll be a beauty. She'll have an

exciting life, brothers, complicated relations with them, she'll marry but I can't see her husband clearly, great love but I can't see his life.

(March 12 1573)

"O sleep, O gentle sleep, (aha! Shakespeare)
Nature's soft nurse!
How have I frighted thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness? –"

Since this began, this horror, I don't sleep much. Our daughter is with us, her husband is with the army... We sleep in the same room... the distance of two separate rooms seems too great... My husband, my king, came last night from that slaughterhouse that – for reasons that escape me – he keeps calling 'war'... it was after midnight... I pretended to be asleep but peeped behind the eiderdown... He was standing over our daughter's bed, holding a big black teddy-bear and staring into the darkness... His shoulders shook as if he were crying... I don't believe he was – that sort never cries.

Wait... this seems familiar... Oh God... My poor mother... God... these aren't Marguerite de Valois' memoirs! My mum is inventing Queen Margot's diary so as not to write her own... a poor general's wife who does not dare write her own diary and invents someone else's diary instead... I still have that teddy-bear... I still have that teddy-bear... (*she looks for the teddy-bear and finds it*) I got it for my nineteenth birthday, a week before my husband left for the front.... I too lay awake that night and pretended to sleep, but watched my father as he stood above me over my bed... he smelled of earth... and as his tears fell onto my pillow... I could hear tup...tup... each time a tear dropped... in the morning a man in uniform came to tell me that my husband "fell fighting heroically for freedom of his nation"... ahhh... 'heroically'... ahhh... 'nation'... I don't need a nation... ahhh! I don't need a hero, I need my husband. My ordinary sweet husband. No hero. Will freedom know how to sing, the way the down-trodden always have sung about it? Oh God...

.....that was the craziest wedding that France ever saw... All the dignitaries were there, their wives,

their lovers, their wives' lovers... and the rhythm just kept accelerating... alcohol... alcohol... alcohol... At the beginning only lovers exchanged wet glances...

“The eyes those silent tongues of love”.... more and more daring... wine, Champagne... torrents of Champagne... brakes slacken... and the rhythm just gets faster... faster... the dance crazier and crazier... bolder and bolder... bosoms all over the place... like Turkish Delights... swaying in rhythm... like mad... Men sweating, mad with the smell of mating...

My poor mum. This is how she imagines her wedding. He a king, she a queen and her wedding the entrance of Adam and Even into Paradise. My poor mum... (she makes a few steps of 'kolo'*) And it was surely just like my wedding... kolo... come ooon... gypsies... then kolo again... Men drink until they shit in their frocks and the women try to have fun as they can... God, when I remember my wedding... Wedding!... on one side my folk, then nothing, then his... You could cut hate with a knife... On my side my four brothers... contained, well dressed... on his side they... the other religion... suspicious... whispering amongst them... fleeting glances all round... Males... of different religions... Like a pressure cooker when it begins to whistle... and then... is it the hormones? or I don't know what triggers it... all that tenderness, all these glances, signals... all that Eros... a sudden salto mortale... and... a first clash... second clash... and then a scuffle... My ex-lover... the dearest one... couldn't resist... Maybe it wasn't so much the jealousy, as much as freaking over the idea that I'm marrying someone of another religion. A marriage without a fight... unimaginable !

*kolo' a traditionnal circular dance, always danced in popular gatherings

1.

2. (August 24 1572) It has begun. For a moment it seemed it would somehow work out. That the slaughter might be avoided ... A second. A stupid pretext... “I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, Straining upon the start”. I dreamt, the night before, that I lay in my bed, wrapped up in sheets, that it's hot and I'm perspiring, but instead of sweat, blood was coming out of my pores. Under the armpits, on my chest, legs, from my hair, blood dripped out of all pores.

I lay there, in those sticky, bloody sheets and screamed, but no one heard me. In my dream, blood also dripped out of the lined walls of the room. That was the night before that night.

3.

4.

5.

6. "Night's black mantle covers all alike.

7. What is well done is done soon enough."

- aaand, that night it began... Wild beasts out in the streets... Armed, drunken, roaming around in herds, howling and flaring blood. They yelled to scare the enemy and their own fright. St. Bartholomew's night... thousands killed in one night. Is it possible? To exterminate thousands of whatever – mosquitoes, cockroaches... thousands... Handy-work... in the name of what? Faith?... One's nation? How is it possible to find enough beasts ready to commit serial killing on such a scale... by hand... how is it possible? And at night he comes home... he snores... and the next morning he continues to make History.

O Lord, give me enough faith to understand even this as thy will... all this blood as thy will?

My poor mother. Poor Marguerite de Valois. God's will – my foot!

My brothers, all four of them, crazy, stormed with that drunken crowd into our house as in a trance. The eldest was waving around a bayonet in one hand, dragging some poor young priest with the other. He came up to my husband, who stood there in pajamas, and yelled, his face two inches from my husband's face: « either you convert to our faith or I'll slit your throat right now ... ». He'll slit my husband's throat! eh... my brother... only because he's not of the same faith... I just stood in a corner... couldn't let out a sound... As if his knife were already in my throat... all I did was scream inside... convert, convert to their faith... change to it! no faith is worth more than your life... What good is faith if there is no life to believe in it? That night my husband changed faith... « God is one anyway... » he said softly in the morning while we ate our breakfast in silence... I did not say anything. My brother's knife still seemed stuck in my throat...

« The day is sort of sunny.
You are sort of gay.
You stroll by, they sort of don't see you.

Everyone is sort of enjoying themselves madly.
Everyone is sort of well.
Everyone is sort of having a hell of a good time.

And you are sort of happy.

We live in a sort of peace.
The birds are sort of free.
The future is sort of in the palm of our hand.

Conscience is sort of clear.
And the sun has sort of understood it all.
O, heart, sing, sort of...

We all sort of care for each other.
We are all sort of friends.
Everyone sort of cares about you
and about the world.

And the day sort of dies away.
and you sort of smile!
and nothing, sort of, hurts »

Enes Kisevic

(September 27 1576) "We are ready to try our fortunes to the last man." **Bells
ringing... Triumph... music...** "Alas! all music jars when the soul's out of tune"

« ...and he never put his arms around me
war is a huge evil that walks
slips into homes, slips into the soul
takes both home and soul
and all I needed was
for him to put his arms around me for a while

I hid when I cried
I hid when I hated
I hid from my children
that I needed love
if only he had put his arms around me but once
the war would have been over for me
it would have been the end
of the horror that walks, takes land
takes the city, takes your home
destroys the soul
three hundred days of war
and he never even looked at me
three hundred days and three hundred nights
war has no soul no eyes

we have been together too long
and I know love wears out
like coins, like memories

...but all I needed was
for him to put his arms around me... »

Abdulah Sidran

My king is beginning to change... he writes History... he doesn't speak like other people anymore... he speaks as if someone were noting his grand thoughts all the time... *ultime parole famose*... as if he were developing some kind of new hormones... like acne on an adolescent... like a new face in the mirror... As if the fact that he is able to decide about life and death were not some administrative decision, but God's own – and he is the one who makes this decision for God... When the sky falls some people believe they'll catch the rainbow... As if little by little he were beginning to assume the part of God. Capricious. To some he gives, from others he takes life... Oh Lord... a wild beast lies down next to me each night, snores, rises in the morning and goes off to make History... I remain silent... and pray... « A closed mouth catches no flies»

Aaah, this is my mother's favourite poem by Sidran:

Grand feast in Sarajevo, Autumn 1769

Hm, another one to place today's wounds and war in an imagined time...

« It's been quite a while, no one's been eager to follow the flag. Vienna's far away, Russia far, may their cursed house stay far away! ! But, willy-nilly a mere thousand of our folk gathered somehow, from god knows where, crooks, rascals, good-for-nothings ! And that scruffy bunch of scoundrels will attack Moscow!?

But surprise! What do you know, only good news from up North! They took Hochin, beat the soul out of the Russian, any minute now Moscow will fall! The authorities issued a command to make feast! as if we needed any encouragement! Must say we didn't shut-up shop, the instruction was: 'with dignity and serious intent'. Cannons blasted from Tabye, all of a sudden, as if they had sprung from the ground, all sorts of folks swarmed into town.

There was one from Misir – the money he took ! – brought a bird : neither a hen nor a cow, long-legged, long-necked, doesn't fly, but boy can it run – heaven help us ! another brought that beast, monkey-chimp, craftier than the devil – tobe jarabum, tobe estagirulah! *(note - in Turkish in the original: 'Lord have mercy, heaven help*

us?)

Suddenly from nowhere appears some gypsy Smolyan who can remove stones from the gall bladder by hand, and that Becho who can cast a spell with his eyes.

Cannons blast from Tabye, males feast, females too, feast the young and the aged, the authorities closed all their eyes: brothels opened, dens of iniquity full of female folk! too much at once – anyone with an ounce of brain knows : this can only end in tears! but, when we feast, we go the whole hog!

After a while cripples started returning home: some missing an arm, some missing a leg, some missing an eye, some missing an ear, and two – missing their reason. But they say right: what victory, codswallop!? Who invented that! Should the Danube freeze – the Russians will walk into Constantinople... The feast fell flat like a bad soufflé. Where were you – nowhere, what have you done - nothing.

Drowsy authorities came to – opened each eye, pricked up all ears, punished trainees and apprentices closed inns and taverns, imposed taxes on whores and ordered that from each house war tax will be levied on male heads (this became a custom: add, top-up, whenever the state is at loss!)

Well it's been and gone - to hell with it now. But since this feast turned sour, since this celebration ruffled all our feathers – everyone's gone off feasts and celebrations, let alone flags and battles. May their cursed house stay far away! »

(March 22 1615) Hmm... more Sidran

„One should in fact die as soon as possible. And then let everything go on exactly the same, but without us. We've paid enough and long enough – without learning anything, except to groan in the ear of those close to us, saying an inappropriate word and at an inappropriate time.

There. Just die, simply, my friend. Let others fulfill the aim of our existence in this world: others with stronger souls, with a somewhat crueller flesh under their skins. It would be a just dream, the one in which one would breathe air full of ozone, the one in which our laughter rang, a dream from long ago that exists no more.

And if at least we could have helped someone! If even for a moment, our word were to soothe someone! If, in it all, at least one little nurishing leaf of essence smoldered! But nothing. Grief multiplied, and an infinite exercise in suffering. Obscurity everywhere.“

Oh God, has this experiment not lasted long enough?

2000 years of men who write history. Plus prehistory.
Give the world to women, Lord, that they may arrange it
with a tender hand. Like a kitchen. Like a kitchen where
all can be harmonious, living side by side. The sweet and
the salty, sour and the hot. Give the world to women,
Lord, that they may arrange it with a tender hand. Like a
kitchen... Like a kitchen...

My poor mother.

« Non est salus nisi in fuga. (Flight is the only refuge.) And I beg you to believe only this: I am not running away from my human duty, I am running away in order to accomplish it completely and without hindrance. To you and to our Bosnia, for the new life of the people and of the nation, I wish you good luck!» My poor unhappy mother. Poor unhappy Queen Margot...

Here, I'm putting on my little lilac dress.... Here, I quit crying... Do you hear General, Sir? I'm leaving your front. My act of sabotage.... « Non est salus nisi in fuga... »

(at the end she puts on the little lilac dress, takes the suitcase into which she has been packing things as she spoke – mourning stays on stage, she exits down the center staircase through the audience)