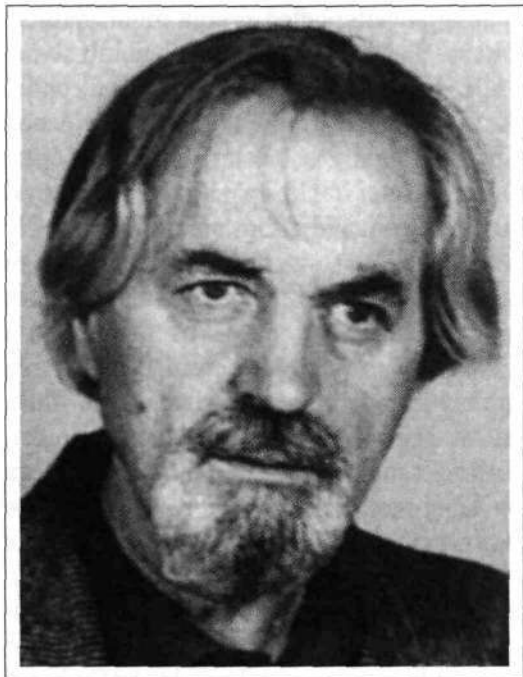


ANDREEVSKI, Petre M.



Petre M. Andreevski, born in Sloeštica, Demir Hisar, in 1934, is a poet, short story writer, novelist, playwright, critic, translator, scripwriter and children's writer. He has published the following collections of poetry: *Knots*, 1960, *In the Sky and On the Earth*, 1962, *Far Anvils*, 1971, *Lauds and Complaints*, 1976, *Eternal House*, 1987. His collections of short stories are *The Seventh Day*, 1964, *Faithless Years*, 1974, and *All Faces of Death*, 1994. He has also published four novels and two plays. He has received four Macedonian literary awards, two of them twice.

Petre M. Andreevski, rođen u Sloeštici, Demir Hisar, 1934. godine. Pjesnik, novelist, romanopisac, dramatičar, kritičar, prevoditelj, scenarist i pisac za djecu. Zbirke poezije: *Čvorovi*, 1960, *I na nebu i na zemlji*, 1962, *Udaljeni nakovnji*, 1971, *Pohvale i pritužbe*, 1977, *Vječna kuća*, 1990. Zbirke novela: *Sedmi dan*, 1964, *Nevjerne godine*, 1974, *Sva lica smrti*, 1994. Romani: *Pirika*, 1980, *Škakavci*, 1984, *Poslednji seljaci*, 1989. Drame: *Bogunemili*, 1971, *Vrijeme pjevanja*, 1975. Dobio je više nagrada: "Braća Miladinovci" dvaput, "Racinovo priznanje", "Stale Popov" dvaput i "11 Oktombri".

PETRE M. ANDREEVSKI

The Vampire

Not a single night passed after the interment of Naiden Stoikoichin but he returned to the village. Why he returned and what for, whom to spite, whether he had forgotten anything or not, whether he had remembered anything that happened after his death was something nobody could tell. Some people gossiped that his bereaved wife Naidenitsa helped him return, for she forgot to wash in the Nocheski ditch after the funeral and splash water over her shoulder. Others believed that he was transformed into the person who turned around with a very sad expression on his face while leaving the cemetery. There were many guesses accompanying his return even though nobody could see what he brought back with him. Was it his deceased soul alone or was there something beside it? Even though nobody could see Naiden Stoikoichin, they all felt him at their side. At one time he was noticed in the form of a stale house smell, at some other as somebody's shadow, but most often he appeared as something that whizzes past the back of your head and then circulates through your trouser legs and sleeves like a gust of wind. He appeared everywhere he used to pass before his madness-induced demise. He repeatedly demolished gardens, letting cattle in to trample over the vegetables, or rode neighbourhood horses, wandering across the mountains. Every time a horse returned with sweaty flanks and froth around the mouth everybody knew it was surely ridden by Naiden Stoikoichin... During that blessed year, the longest they could remember, there was nothing the people didn't see... They would sit down to supper when they saw a spoon that no hand was holding rise above the table, stir food and move through the air. People would freeze and long after that they would stay there gaping, with food not yet chewed in their mouths. After a time, some elderly people got scared and asked Naidenitsa to pray to Naiden not to frighten them, so she prayed and they asked her to pray some more, saying: "Pray some more."

“Go back, Naiden, to where we left you,” Naidenitsa kept repeating. “Why didn’t you take all of him, oh God, why didn’t you take all of him,” Naidenitsa was saying all excited, while in the meantime people looked at each other, gloomily and painfully did they look at each other and the night oozed out of their pupils. Even though they trembled like leaves they looked as if their bodies moved not at all, or only with the eyes alone. They felt cold shivers running up their spines, and the whole room was filled with chill whenever a window was left ajar out of mercy for Naidenitsa to let Naiden Stoikoichin exit. Right then, at that very moment, all the village dogs started barking. It was a deafening howl rising up to the sky that was heard across the mountains. In fact, the deafening howl of the dogs was virtually heard on the day he rode out of the village. “It’ll undermine the foundations of our houses, this devilish howling,” thought the villagers, blocking their ears, holding their breath, they even stopped the river, some people saw the river stop flowing, it didn’t dry up but rather stopped and turned into marble.

“What kind of a trail do you leave for the dogs,” Naidenitsa began to whisper. “Who are they barking at? What do they see when you yourself are never seen, Naiden?”

That whole blessed year nobody slept at all, nobody was seduced by sleep for they feared being strangled, dragged into some fiery whirlpool in the centre of the main current, afraid of awaking high on a distant tree. Whenever a person dozed off he would jump up immediately after closing his eyes and scream that he’d been trampled on by some horseshoe carrying a weightless burden. People would gather around him, giving him sweetened water to drink, and then everybody would smoke some dry and smelly grass. The smoke made them choke and cough in pain just as their nights were long and painful.

What were Naidenitsa’s nights like? How did she gnash her teeth, how did she feel at dawn? Namely, her nights were the longest nights you can imagine. Naiden made them so, climbing stairs, scratching at her windows, opening numerous doors and little doors, unsettling firewood in the hearth... But woe to her during the long and painful nights when he crawled into her bed and she would be crushed by a weight much too heavy for her. At times like that, first she wanted to believe it was the blanket, so she immediately pushed it away, pushed it away in judgement day torment, yet the weight remained and it made her start praying again:

“Go away, Naiden, don’t torture me. Be good the way you were when your legs still brought you home. What brings you home now, Naiden, darkness or the wind?”

And so, while Naidenitsa prayed she had the impression that she heard these words: “Where shall I go, my dear wife, where shall I return to when I never came from anywhere to begin with?” In fact, Naidenitsa herself was saying these words in part reproachfully and in part as a useless consolation. And as soon as she felt a little bit relieved she knew that Naiden was listening

to her words of prayer and shifting to some other corner in the room. However, one night he entered her house a number of times, bringing with him some sweets stolen at Vidan Siveski's tavern. "How can he bring them at all, oh God," was the thought that crossed Naidenitsa's mind at the time. "Whose hands does he pick them with when we left his hands under ground? Whose pockets does he cram them into and how does he take them out when the tavern is locked?" But still, he brought her sweets: once he gnashed his teeth high in the air, in the revoltingly sick air, and the sweets were scattered across the middle of the room as if they'd flown in from somewhere. Now and then they fell into her skirt and at times like that she felt beads of sweat trickle from under her chin, her armpits and everywhere else on her body.

"I cannot eat what has been stolen, Naiden, so you can be angry with me if you want but I shall return them to the innkeeper," Naidenitsa said, her tongue swollen with fear, and she took them back the very next day.

"I never thought he would steal from me," the innkeeper Viden Siveski muttered, arranging some sort of a pencil behind his ear. "I couldn't believe that the man who was punishing criminals all his life would steal from me."

"Forgive him, brother Vidan," Naidenitsa said. "Who knows what he feels like? He is walking among people but nobody can see him. Perhaps his nights and days are one, and nobody would know what to do with all that time on his hands, nobody would know how to go about it."

"That may be so," replied Vidan Siveski, the innkeeper. "Perhaps a dead man needs a friend, but why in the world did he choose stealing as his profession?"

"Forgive him, brother Vidan," Naidenitsa repeated. "I shall give you back everything he steals from you, I'll return it to you."

Well, Naiden Stoikoichin wasn't stealing from Vidan Siveski's tavern alone but rather from every house in the village. When the Nechkovcis missed a pile of haystacks it was found on Naidenitsa's threshing floor. Some could well see the haystacks move through the air and descend on Naidenitsa's threshing floor. Later on, people would come out in large numbers to see the stolen objects fly over the village and come down at Naidenitsa's house. When the Plevneshovtsis' ass died it was found tied to a pole in Naidenitsa's stable. The Bubushovtsis missed a bale of tobacco and some apples used as invitations to a wedding. The Kvachkovtsis were short of a wagon of pumpkins. The Jonovtsis missed a ring of chilli peppers and three rings of onions. And the Shvrgovtsis were left without the coloured yarn for knitting socks plus two or three baskets of dogwood, eggs and hazelnuts. All of that, too, was found at Naidenitsa's place. And she kept returning everything up to the last needle, even when the villagers stole from each other. She returned the things that weren't found at her place, too, as long as she was in the position to do so. When she could no longer do that, the villagers complained.

"We will have no woman who associates with the devil in our village," people screamed, gathering in waves in front of her house. "Where do you hide the things he steals?"

"Is there nothing but hatred that brings you to me?" Naidenitsa asked, her hands crossed on her belly, swearing to a loaf of bread and the sun, swearing that she had nothing, that she knew nothing.

"Don't take a false oath," screamed the villagers. "We never slept a wink all year, as God is our witness. Our cattle has lost weight, food is repulsive to us. We no longer wish to live with theft and fear," cackled the villagers.

"Since you don't believe me, good people, tell me how I can redeem myself, what I can redeem myself with," Naidenitsa kept repeating, wiping tears from her cheeks.

"You can redeem yourself by moving to a place where sickness spends the night and where ghosts get together," the villagers screamed, "or by collecting the money for the man who can see vampires, for only a man who can see vampires is capable of killing one."

Once again, Naidenitsa swore that she had no way of finding that kind of money and that Naiden, knowing he would be killed though he was already dead, would leave her some money. However, the villagers reminded her of her fields, telling her to sell the land to them. "What shall I live from, then?" Naidenitsa asked. "Don't try to save him by crying," the villagers replied. "Go ahead and die of hunger just as we are dying from fear all the year round," the villagers said.

Three days later they brought forth the man who could see vampires. God knows where they found him, where they got him from, but the fact is they did, and they immediately gave him a gun. At nightfall, the village dogs started barking furiously and everybody knew that Naiden Stoikoichin had entered the village and their man went after him. The villagers followed the man, hairy as the night, together with the howling of the dogs and the river that stopped again, it didn't dry up but rather stopped and turned to marble.

"There he is," whispered the man who could see vampires. "He saw me already, so he fled. Now he's climbing the barn, jumping on the enclosed porch, trying to hide in the shed, attempting to turn into a spider, a cockroach or a moth. I don't know what he wants but whatever it is he can't do it, so now he's running across the threshing floor," the man said, and as he was pronouncing these words he suddenly stopped, lifted the gun and took a shot. The shot rang in the night, it hurried across the fields, reached the slopes and bounced off the mountain. The shot, in fact, seemed to uncork something of the night itself. It seemed to squeeze out a certain weight so that the dogs stopped barking and the river was running again as it did before.

"Where did he hide the blood?" the villagers asked themselves, returning to their homes. "How did he carry it?" they whispered, meaning the spilt blood that swamped Naidenitsa's threshing floor.

The next day her threshing floor was dark with people. Men and women gathered there, the young and the elderly, the sick and the healthy. Everybody was there, pressing, shoving, stomping, some were hopping or simply craning their necks, others kneeled down, forcing their way into the crowd to see the blood of Naiden Stojkojchin's ghost and his second death. Meanwhile on the threshing floor, lying in a pool of blood, surrounded by a host of people, there was Naidenitsa. She lay there shot in the heart, with her eyes open wide, staring up at the sky, and with a smile on her face. She seemed to be the most beautiful and the happiest corpse in the world.

"He definitely had to kill her, too, in order to kill him," said an old man.

"But why did she let him hide in her heart?" people asked, lifting their heads toward the slopes down which people from neighbouring villages rushed gurgling like summer torrents in a dry riverbed come alive.

Transated by Dušanka Zabukovec