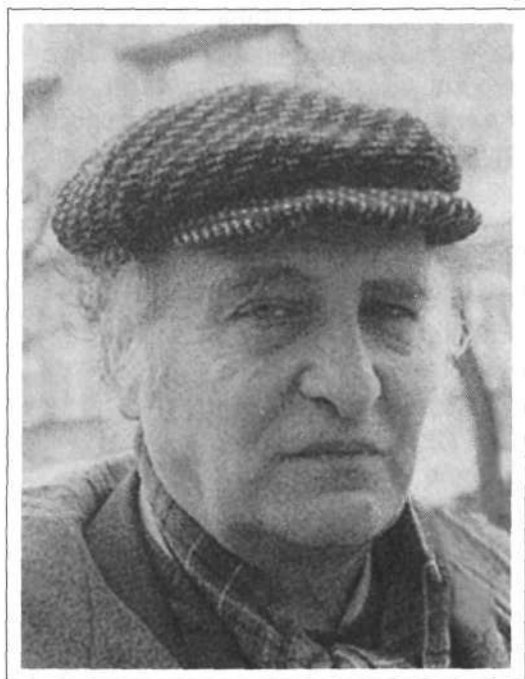


DAVID, Filip



Filip David was born in 1940 in Kragujevac, Serbia. He graduated in Yugoslav literatures and comparative literature from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, and in dramaturgy from the Academy for theatre, radio, film and television. For many years he was Head of Drama at TV Belgrade, but in 1991 he was removed from his post because of public opposition to the chauvinist and war-mongering policies of Slobodan Milošević. So far he has published short story collections *The Well in the Forest*, 1964, *Remarks about the Real and Unreal*, 1969, *The Prince of Fire*, 1987, the novel *Pilgrims of Heaven and Earth*, 1995, a diary from the early Nineties, *Are we Beasts*, 1996, and a book of correspondence with Mirko Kovač, 1998. He has written many stage and television plays, and a number of screenplays. His most frequently produced plays are *A Ballad about Good People* and *One day, my Jamele*. He has received the Mladost Prize, Milan Rakić Prize, BIGZ Prize, the Andrić Prize, and other awards. He lives in Belgrade.

Filip David je rođen 1940. godine u Kragujevcu. Diplomirao je jugoslavenske književnosti i svjetsku književnost na Filološkom fakultetu u Beogradu, te dramaturgiju na Akademiji za pozorište, radio, film i televiziju. Godinama je radio kao urednik Dramskog programa TV Beograd, ali je 1991. godine udaljen s posla prevashodno zbog javnog suprotstavljanja šovinističkoj i ratnohušakačkoj politici Slobodana Miloševića. Dosad je objavio knjige pripovjedaka: *Bunar u tamnoj šumi* (1964), *Zapisi o stvarnom i nestvarnom* (1969), *Princ vatre* (1987); roman: *Hodočasnici neba i zemlje* (1995); knjigu dnevnikačkih zapisa s početka devedestih godina s naslovom *Jesmo li čudovišta* (1996), te knjigu prepiske s Mirkom Kovačem *Knjiga pisama, 1992-1995* (1998). Autor je više pozorišnih i TV drama, te filmskih scenarija. U njegovom dramskom opusu posebno se izdvajaju drame *Balada o dobrim ljudima* i *Jednog dana, moj Jamele*. Dobitnik je nagrade lista Mladost, Nagrade Milan Rakić, BIGZ-ove nagrade, Andrićeve nagrade i drugih. Živi u Beogradu.

FILIP DAVID

Images from the "Land of the Blind"

There are times when the human life exists in impossible conditions. It might even be made smaller and reduced to a grain of dust; it might be turned into a rifle bullet, a loaf of bread, a fistful of rice, the sound of the trumpet.

Millions of people are temporarily turned into armies of ants, packs of wild dogs, herds and flocks. Humanity can be lost much easier than gained. There are no creatures in the animal world that can turn into a human being, but a human being can easily turn into a beast.

In our age, which is drawing to a close, human life is not respected. In the *Gulag Archipelago*, cannibalism was at times the only way to survive. The Chinese author, Tzeng-Ji, writes that, at the time of the Cultural Revolution, the practice of cannibalism was proof of a high class consciousness. It is not exactly known how many unfortunate people were devoured by the masses in the different Chinese districts. What is certain is that several hundred ideological enemies were eaten. In the territory of the former Yugoslavia, people were impaled alive, thrown into a fire or suffered ritualistic mutilations. At the core of these horrors is also cannibalism. The age of barbarity and concentration camps is not over yet. On the contrary, it is in full expansion.

Determining identity. One of the particularly important and often mentioned words in this seething chaos of ours is identity. Identity is exclusively associated with ethnic roots. The new cartographers of our spiritual and physical

space have discovered yet another powerful method of ruling over human destinies. Profound changes in behaviour stem from a serious identity crisis. György Konrád wrote about the relationship between identity and hysteria. Having lived through the Golgotha of East European intellectuals, he concludes from his own, but also from the experiences of others, that political hysteria occurs when "national conflicts relegate all the rest to the background." All that is traditionally valuable is politicised by the official ideology. Thus, the true values of culture are equated with the stupidity and tyranny of the dictator and the idiocy he produces. Identity is created and reaffirmed on the basis of incompatible elements. Associated with this are the minds that hold a place in the world cultural heritage thanks to their shallowmindedness of court favourites. The heroic deeds of honourable individuals are associated with the nonsense of state propaganda. Hysteria is manifested through general intolerance and prejudice. "The idea of national identity on the stage of hysteria may turn into racism," points out Konrád. "Western Europe is moving towards multicultural integration, while Eastern Europe is approaching monocultural disintegration. In the West we have post-nationalism, in the East we have pre-nationalism. Is it not that first there is separation and then reunion? What now will do all those masses of people who carry in them multinational genes and more than one culture in their heads? Each man has several identities. If he swears by only one, the others are necessarily stifled."

Identity in a ruined national or ideological state, a state of true lawlessness, is a complex problem and the object of gross manipulation. From behind the anachronistic, romantic understanding of identity emerges the deformed figure of violence. The right to identity is granted by a higher power to specific groups, while the character and quality of identity pass judgement on life and death.

The establishment of the narrowed down and individually understood identity in a time of great crisis, in fact, divides the populace into first and second class citizens, into superior and inferior beings, thus fomenting passions to a point of deep hatred and introducing new forms of loyalty. Individuals are driven into herds, and herds are enclosed in corrals.

Identity based on national or ideological exclusivity distorts and cripples the personality. It is not only fuelled by morbid nationalism and deformed politics, but is also produced by them. In the beginning there is hysteria, at the end paranoia, while between the two and after paranoia, there is nothing but general misfortune.

Demons. National rhetoric places the equal sign between nation and religion. But this goes against the very essence of religion. "Nationalism turns its own nation into an idol, and in doing so, detests and threatens other nations. From that point on, nationalism can quite easily become chauvinism and racism. One of the first signs of the decline or loss of spirituality in a given age, civilisation or nation is the demand for 'ethnically pure areas'. Vladeta Jerotić, psychologist and professor of theology notes that "ethnophiletism and ethnocentrism are the high priests of our age."

The obsession of evil souls has several faces: It may be zealous nationalism or blind ideology, manifested through violence, savage hatred and homicidal force. In each of these images, there exists one or several demons. And from the demonic power, which is squandered lavishly, rises the voice of savagery, political violence, racism and the purest form of heresy.

Demons, evil spirits, ghosts of totalitarian ideologies, spectres of ethnic cleansings and servile, bootlicking mentality – all of these monsters of new and old mythologies are resurrected wherever the fundamental pillars of society have been lost: faith, morality, honour, respect of others and self-respect. These foundations can easily be destroyed but are difficult to rebuild. Impure forces are not the forces of construction, but rather, the forces of destruction. Demons are bad masters but even worse servants.

Everything has its price, only a human life has none. It is trivial merchandise offered for next to nothing. War zones are strewn with mass graves. An ordinary human being is drawn into this terrible maelstrom of widespread tragedy, merely struggling to survive. His hatred and nausea reach only as far as his neighbour. He cannot or does not wish to realise that the law of supply and demand has become the rule; that life and death are traded like merchandise, and that his life only serves as small change for settling accounts.

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In the recently published book of Kiš's literary legacy, the following passage can be found: "Because for the intellectuals of today, of this age of ours, there is only one test of conscience; there are only two subjects in which one fails, not in the sense of losing one year, but in the sense of losing the right to cast his (moral) vote once and for all: fascism and Stalinism. All the rest is pure nonsense." In another passage Kiš quotes Albert Camus: "There is no reason in the world, be it historical or otherwise, progressive or reactionary, which can persuade me to accept the existence of concentration camps."

Yet they do exist! At the international tribunal in the Hague began the trials against the crimes perpetrated in the concentration camps of our time.

Most of the public is not horrified by the irrefutable fact that such camps have existed (and perhaps still do). Their horror is reduced to the fact that their compatriot is on trial. What pitiful absence of morals and sense of justice! A pitiful and irrational show of loyalty. Loyalty to whom? For what?

The only true loyalty refers to those essential principles that rise above the state, the nation, and venture beyond every rule. But without the respect for loyalty no state, nation or government has any meaning.

Compelled by the current situation in Germany, Thomas Mann wrote in 1934 about the dangerous regimes, which adopt the methods of unlimited propagation of lies and stupefaction. Mann was resented for such direct and uncompromising criticism, as he departed from his literary ethics based on irony and distance. The writer replied that, considering the current circumstances, the "defender of pure literature feels self-pity, because the political struggle in the current conditions is at times more significant, important and more deserving of respect than the entire body of poetry." The regime accused Mann of treason. Many years later, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, in his *Supplement to the Theory of Treason*, writes about the unavoidability of treason: "It is particularly crucial for the logic of this notion that under certain historical conditions everyone must become a traitor."

Unamuno discovered in the Spain of his time a "terrible teamster mentality" and "a vast quagmire of simple-mindedness." He complained about the barren and vacuous patriotism which goes no further than "the impure desire for military expropriation and vengeance." "Each one of us sees in one's neighbour a shortcoming that is common to all of us." "We created a history full of lies, vacuity and carelessness, and this is sorely felt." He concludes that empty-headedness is responsible for everything, because "an empty head has no ideas, reads no newspapers, and does not even vote - it only signs the reports of fictitious election results. If, at times, it is excited by them, it immediately jumps up. Of the innumerable lies that stifle and paralyse us in Spain, few of them are more untrue than the one about our democracy, which is in fact "ochlocracy," the rule of the masses and the illiterate crowd. Is it democracy when in the most enlightened region, Alava, almost a fifth of all adults, or 19.79 percent, cannot read; when in the most backward region, Haen, more than half of the population, or 65.79 percent, is illiterate, while almost half of the total Spanish population is illiterate! This is analphabetocracy."

Unamuno's Spain of the beginning of the century has become a metaphor of our situation at the close of the century.

The universality of madness is symbolically represented by the picture of a snake devouring its own tail, and by a "hundred-headed dragon, surrounded by poisonous snakes." These are the depictions of the power and might of madness which has risen against the human mind and spirit.

Empty-headedness, stupidity, illiteracy are the sources of all arrogance and misery. These are the sources of madness! Ever since the beginning of world and time. There is nothing new under the firmament.

The great nightmare. An ordinary person, the victim of propaganda and manipulation, records with a tiny part of his still uninfected consciousness that yesterday he was told one thing, and today he is being told something completely different. He can no longer determine the meaning of many notions because they have been transformed into empty, content-less shells.

Until recently, he was filled with national fervour, a feeling of greatness and power before an idea that seemed powerful and indestructible like solid granite. But now he feels dejected and miserable, because the main pillars of the promised order – one nation, one homeland and one leader, have crumbled rapidly and unexpectedly in the best possible manner. The people have been betrayed and turned against each other. The homeland – the imagined one – has remained in their imaginations, while the leader failed to deliver on his promises. Not only that nothing has turned for the better, but rather, everything is going downhill. And so life has become a great nightmare.

But a very real nightmare is taking place on the roads of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia in the form of endless columns of homeless people and refugees.

Serbia as well is experiencing a persistent nightmare. Economically, Serbia is drawing its last breath and is without a single true ally in the world. Deprived of its youth and reason, it can hardly defend itself, let alone others.

Nightmare begets nightmare. Are the people being betrayed and sacrificed? The word 'treason' is on the lips of many. But that word only expresses desperation, nothing more. The great wave of populism that was triggered at the beginning of the 1990's is merging – after four years of bloodthirsty war – with the great wave of refugees. The nightmare has begun with the "happening of the people," and is ending with the unprecedented suffering of the people. And so the circle is closing. But it is only one of the circles of hell. No one can say that this is in fact the end of the tragedy that was triggered by the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Behind every enduring and bloodthirsty war there must be a hypnotist. He has succeeded in hypnotising the masses, but is unable to reawaken them

from the trance. The mystic, Gurdjieff, wrote: "There is a war going on at this very moment. What does it mean? It means that several million hypnotised people are out to destroy several million other people. Had they been awake, they would not be doing this. This hypnotic state is responsible for everything that is taking place." Awakening comes after a very powerful shock. But what is the scale of a catastrophe that can return the hypnotised people to the realm of consciousness? The hypnotist is no longer able to do so. The hypnotic dream has become even deeper than his willpower; it has become a new reality.

Dialogue. In mid-September of 1994, the Polish Sunday newspaper, *Politika*, carried a discussion between Adam Michnik and Jürgen Habermas on the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Since that time, the problems have remained the same; the situation has become even more complicated, but the violence, misery, illusions and madness have only escalated. The important questions that were asked at that time have not been answered.

Habermas: "After 1945, for the first time, Germany saw the establishment of a rather precarious democracy, but this was possible only because nationalism had been discredited." Michnik pointed out that he had many friends in the former Yugoslavia. Most of them were convinced that European democracy was washed up and that in the future one could rely on the establishment of the utopia of ethnically cleansed states. "This is the most terrible message I have ever heard in my life," declared Michnik. "It is even more dangerous than communism."

The dialogue continued with the discussion on the collective guilt of a nation. Habermas said: "There is no collective guilt. Everyone who is guilty must be responsible as an individual. There is, however, something like collective responsibility of the intellectual and of the cultural situation in which mass crimes become possible."

The empires of tyrants. The prevalent feelings of today are those of denial and deprivation. It seems to us – but it is, in fact, not only our imagination – that someone is using our lives for specific objectives of their own. There is an entire pyramid of sacred obligations, duties and disciplines that fulfil life from top to bottom. Motherland, nation, strong institutions, church, party, leader – all of these words have been turned into canons, into an election without any true choice: In the name of which of these lofty, sacred things are we to sacrifice ourselves? Everything here is lofty and sacred, except the human life which is small, so tiny that it cannot be reduced any further. In order to

achieve the pharaonic objectives, a single life is not enough. Hundreds of thousands, even millions of lives are needed. A single life is only a drop in the bucket, a grain of sand on the beach, practically zero. However, without a million of enslaved subjects, without the human rubble, there is no empire of tyranny.

Nationalism as an ideology. In the history of the contemporary political movements and ideas, nationalism has been analysed as a transient phenomenon, or, as described by Isaiah Berlin in his essay *On Nationalism*, as "an ephemeral product of a frustrated human desire for self-determination."

Nationalistic madness appears and disappears, but does not vanish altogether. In a time of peace, it vegetates latently, unnoticed, as a form of bourgeois mentality and spiritual banality. But in a time of great upheavals, it appears on the central stage with a force and scope of a true epidemic whose effect can be compared to the terrible impact of the "black death" and similar global monstrosities. The nationalism of our age is, in essence, a disease of distorted national tendencies. In its unstoppable assault, it touches and subjugates everything: the masses as well as the individuals, the learned as well as the simple people, the bottom as well as the top of the social pyramid; the economy, science, culture and politics. And whatever it touches, becomes only a mirage of its former self. The main objective is "the domination over others." And the final result is great moral, spiritual and material misery.

There is constant talk about health, while in the inside everything is rotten. Power and might are glorified, while the very foundations of society are crumbling. Products bear the labels of established, well-known companies, but the packaging contains new products of poor quality. A great many words are being used, but they all ring hollow. The worst products of the human spirit: hatred, intolerance, self-adoration, are accorded the highest price. The viewpoints are deformed; the values are displaced or completely distorted. In face of the so-called national interest – an utterly undefined and fuzzy category, subjected to all kinds of manipulation – every other interest and form of thought is first repressed and then mercilessly persecuted. Nationalism, as an ideology, represents a subliminal form of human destructiveness. A nationalistic economy spells disaster for the economic science and market. A nationalistic culture is in every respect backward, unproductive and sterile. A nationalistic state is transformed into a mechanism of organised destruction of everything that is different. This mechanism is programmed in such a way that it finishes off everything that is different, and in the end also passes judgement on itself.

This ideology is driven by passions, not by facts. It is driven by the obsession of its own greatness. The obstacle to the realisation of megalomaniacal projects is always those others. Thus it is preferable to eliminate them by any

means available. Such a view of the world, warns Berlin, "opens the door to an indiscriminate war of everyone against everyone else."

Nationalism is in fact a permanent war, a constant search for and identification of enemies; a particular kind of "collective self-adoration" and collective fascination. This golem, like every irrational monster, always turns against its creator in the end. Nationalistic states destroy the forces that had created them, while the force and horror of internal destruction is only matched by the ravaging forces of external destruction. Nationalistic states are created with fire and blood and will perish the same way.

The use of patriotism. As an ideology, nationalism has one great shortcoming. In her *Erazmus*, Vesna Pusić points out that "nationalism is an ideology without ideas," completely devoid of the "utopian projection." "Instead of being based on an idea," writes Vesna Pusić, "it is based on a combination of self-pity and cruelty, infinitely tender feelings towards its own misfortunes and complete indifference towards the suffering of others." In order to cover up this vacuous aspect of nationalism, patriotism is summoned to the rescue. Patriotism fills this void, providing a feeling of identity and a sense of belonging. This covert game of patriotism endows a state of aggressive nationalism with new, dangerous powers. "If the powers that be are successful in usurping the right to decide who is a patriot and who is not, they have secured the ideological control over their citizens. Thus, old dictatorial methods regain a common base, their universal justification and fictitious legitimacy. This time around, it is not the love of justice and equality but the love for one's homeland."

Such manipulatory tendencies of a state on its way to a new totalitarian regime again bring up the significant and sensitive issue of patriotism. What does it mean to be devoted to a state of injustice, violence and distorted values? What is the position of the individual in these circumstances? Where is his will? Where is the respect for the fundamental principles of ethics? True patriotism serves to unmask and eliminate destructive, ideologised and institutionalised nationalism as the greatest threat to every open society, to every state of justice and welfare.

Discussing different aspects of power, Elias Canetti established the analogy between abuse of power and ill health. "As if by request, here we have an ideal disease that is widespread and well researched. Characteristic of paralysis, particularly of a classical case of paralysis, is the mass production of megalomaniacal ideas. Our society, in fact, suffers precisely from such a disease. Paralysed in its vital activities, without a clear idea of where it is going and

how it will get there, it claims for itself, using thundering rhetoric, all of the positive principles of freedom, justice and equality, of which it respects not a single one.”

Quotation from Politika (21 August 1995): “The thinking of young people is perhaps best illustrated by an opinion poll conducted among German high school students. To the question, “Who are your role models today?” many of them answered: “The Serbs, because they are supermen.” And to the question, “Why do you think so?” they replied, “Because the entire world is against them, yet they refuse to give up ...”

If this “opinion poll” is not merely a journalistic fabrication (which it very likely is), then it is a matter of pure German malice. And the Germans know all too well what happens to the grandiose ideas about supermen and superior nations!

Translated by Marjan Golobič