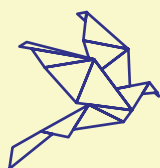


**55. MEDNARODNO SREČANJE ODBORA PISATELJEV IN  
PISATELJIC ZA MIR**

**55<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF WRITERS FOR PEACE  
COMMITTEE**

**55<sup>es</sup> RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES DES ÉCRIVAINS  
ET ÉCRIVAINES POUR LA PAIX**

**55° ENCUENTRO INTERNACIONAL DEL COMITÉ DE  
ESCRITORES Y ESCRITORAS POR LA PAZ**



**Predstavljajte si vse ljudi ...**

**Imagine all the people...**

**Imagine tous les gens ...**

**Imagina toda la gente...**

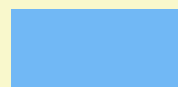


**Odnos literature do (kakšne) resnice**

**Literature is (which) truth and justice?**

**Quel rapport la littérature entretient-elle avec la vérité ?**

**La literatura es (¿cuál?) verdad y justicia?**



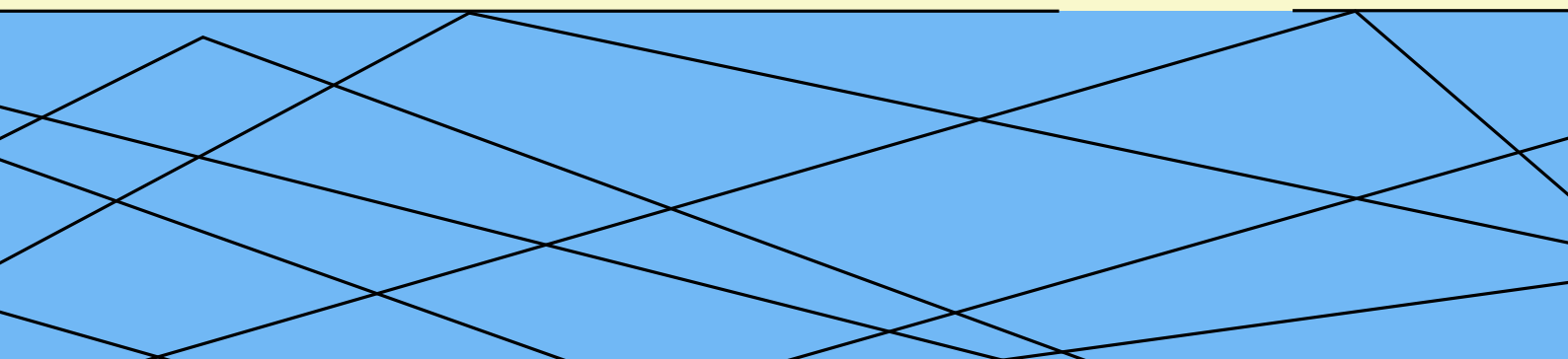
Bled, 2023

Odbor pisateljev in pisateljic za mir Mednarodnega PEN-a

PEN International Writers for Peace committee

Comité international des écrivains et écrivaines pour la paix

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Bled 15. 5. – 18. 5. 2023

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Prispevki za okroglo mizo v slovenščini, francoščini španščini in angleščini

Olha Mukha, Germán Rojas, Tienchi Martin-Liao, Miruna Vlada, Teresa Salema Cadete, Alfred de Zayas, Joachim Helfer, Constantine Pakavakis, Rocío Durán-Barba, Philippe Pujas, Antoine Spire, Ivan Vogrič, Iryna Starovoyt, Lidija Golc, Monika Žagar, Tone Peršak, Tanja Tuma, Sarah Lawson, Ifigenija Simonović, Darinka Kozinc.

Prevajalci

Andraž Golc (prevod pesmi *Predstavljate si*), Ifigenija Simonović (prevod prispevka *Vprašanje o literaturi in resnici*)

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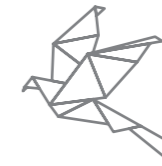
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**PREDSTAVLJAJTE SI VSE LJUDI ...  
IMAGINE ALL THE PEOPLE...  
IMAGINE TOUS LES GENS ...  
IMAGINA TODA LA GENTE...**

Ko je Lennon napisal to pesem, je tretja vesoljska odprava pristala na Luni, vietnamska vojna se je razširila na Laos in prebivalci Bangladeša so se soočili z genocidom. Tako kot danes so bile tudi takrat vojne in zatiranja v vseh kotičkih sveta. Tema 4. Blejskega srečanja je bila "Zakaj pišemo?" Morda odgovor leži v besedi "predstavljajte si". Le predstavljajte si, da bi svet iz Lenonove pesmi, lahko postal resničnost. Kakšna družbena ureditev bi spodbujala mir? Liberalna? Kapitalistična? Nadzirana? Svobodna? Ali bi bilo govora o istem družbenem redu v vseh državah in celinah? Predstavljajte si vse ljudi in izzivajte sedanji svet, ki gori od vojn, z možnostjo miru.

When Lennon wrote this song, the third astronaut mission landed on the Moon, the Vietnam war spread to Laos, and the people of Bangladesh were faced with genocide. Like today, there were wars and repression in nearly every corner of the world. The topic of the 4th Bled meeting that year was Why do we write? Maybe the answer lies in the word "imagine". Just imagine a world from Lennon's song could be made possible. What kind of social order would foster peace? Liberal? Capitalist? Controlled? Free? Would it be the same social order in every country and continent? Imagine all the people and challenge the present world burning with wars with prospects for peace.

Au moment où Lennon a écrit cette chanson, la troisième mission d'astronaute alunissait, la guerre du Vietnam s'étendait au Laos et le peuple du Bangladesh était confronté à un génocide. Comme aujourd'hui, il y avait des guerres et des répressions dans presque tous les coins du monde. Le thème des 4es Rencontres de Bled était « Pourquoi écrivons-nous » ? Peut-être la réponse réside-t-elle dans le mot « imaginer ». Imaginer simplement que le monde de la chanson de Lennon pourrait être possible. Quel type d'ordre social pourrait encourager la paix ? Libéral ? Capitaliste ? Contrôlé ? Libre ? Sur la base du même ordre social dans tous les pays et continents ? Imaginer tous les gens et défier le monde qui actuellement brûle à cause des guerres, avec des perspectives de paix.

Cuando Lennon escribió esta canción, la tercera misión de astronautas aterrizaba en la luna, la guerra de Vietnam se extendía a Laos y el pueblo de Bangladesh se enfrentaba al genocidio. Como hoy, había guerras y represión en casi todos los rincones del mundo. El tema de la 4ª reunión de Bled de ese año fue "¿Por qué escribimos?" Quizá la respuesta esté en la palabra "imaginar". Imaginar que el mundo de la canción de Lennon fuera posible. ¿Qué tipo de orden social fomentaría la paz? ¿Liberal? ¿Capitalista? ¿Controlado? ¿Libre? ¿Sería el mismo orden social en todos los países y continentes? Imagina a toda la gente y enfrenta con la fuerza de la paz al mundo actual que está ardiendo en guerras.

## IMAGINE...

Imagine the train.  
 crawling in silence  
 in the middle of nowhere  
 with its lights off  
 no sign of life  
 as they can cost you your life.  
 imagine a child,  
 sitting on top of a smashed house.  
 with a mouth full of dust  
 scared to swallow  
 as they can swallow their faces.

imagine a piano,  
 whose strings are torn and weeping  
 but the music still huddled inside  
 even if you think it's someone crying  
 they have been quiet  
 since yesterday.

imagine kitchen cabinets  
 with torn-out doors  
 signs of protest  
 signs of survival  
 with pain inside  
 packed into foil

imagine your only home  
 is a piece of Christmas decor  
 squeezed in the hand  
 that I haven't opened for three days  
 because this is my only home  
 the home I can swallow.

## “GITANJALÌ” DE TAGORE, CANTO AL AMOR Y A LA PAZ ENTRE LOS SERES HUMANOS

Fue tu voluntad hacerme infinito, ese es el placer. Este frágil vaso mío tú lo vacías una y otra vez,  
 y lo vuelves a llenar con vida siempre nueva...  
 Sobre estas pequeñas manos mías descienden tus dones infinitos.  
 Pasan las edades y tú continuas llenándolas y todavía hay espacio en ellas.”  
 Canto 1 del “Gitanjali” de Rabindranath Tagore (traducido del inglés).

Al pasear nuestros ojos por el “Gitanjali” (“Ofrenda de los cánticos”) advertimos que estamos ante un texto que no tendrá jamás ocaso. Se trata de un poemario fértil en evocaciones y colmado de cautivantes armonías, que nos llega con reverberaciones que nos hacen vibrar el alma. No estamos acostumbrados en occidente a leer versos portadores de imágenes que nos traen a los ojos una cultura ancestral, casi inmutada en su naturaleza secular y profunda. Tagore es quien nos abre mágicamente las puertas a la gran espiritualidad de la India.

Rabindranath Tagore nació en Calcuta el 6 de mayo de 1861, en el seno de una de las familias más ricas de Bengala, en un ambiente de gran espiritualidad. Falleció en la misma ciudad el 7 de agosto de 1941, es decir su vida coincide enteramente con el dominio británico sobre el así llamado “imperio indio” que se extendió entre 1858 y 1947, por los territorios que hoy conocemos como India, Pakistán, Bangladesh y parte de Myanmar.

La India que le tocó vivir se caracterizaba por tres elementos constitutivos que, de una u otra manera, marcan la sociedad en la que Rabindranath vivió: la **dominación inglesa** que alteró los procesos productivos de la economía local, lo que aumentó la pobreza abismante de las clases populares; **el islam** que entre los siglos X y XIX introdujo un elemento de unidad política y de Estado unitario y **el hinduismo panteísta**, que expresaba una profunda espiritualidad, pero que más que una “religión” era una “religiosidad” de formas arcaicas.

De esta situación histórica emergió la India moderna vinculada a los procesos de urbanización y desarrollo de grandes ciudades. Nació un crisol donde se mezclaron las costumbres éticas inglesas, la veneración a los grandes maestros y filósofos, y el profundo apego a las costumbres y tradiciones, dando nacimiento a la percepción occidental de que la India es el centro mundial de la espiritualidad.

Es a partir de estas condiciones generales de existencia que prevalecen en India en tiempos de Tagore que debemos entender los contenidos y la estética de su poesía. En ella está presente tanto la antigua tradición literaria india (particularmente bengalí), como la influencia estética inglesa de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX en la cual él se formó. Tagore, quien escribía en inglés y en bengalí, se expresó en maneras no enteramente propias de la cultura india antigua, sino que presentó esa cultura en contenidos y formas más asequibles a personas occidentales cultas.

Respecto a la obra “Gitanjali” es interesante notar que la versión en bengalí está escrita en verso y la versión en inglés, realizada por el propio Tagore, está en prosa. Es bien sabida la dificultad que existe en la traducción de obras poéticas. Quizás por ello Tagore optó por la versión inglesa en prosa para darse a conocer



mejor en Occidente. Eso sucedía en noviembre de 1912. Al año siguiente sería galardonado con el Premio Nobel de Literatura.

En este ejercicio de adaptación del bengalí en poesía (una poesía compuesta para ser cantada y no pensada intelectualmente como sucede en las culturas occidentales) al inglés en prosa, muy probablemente jugó un papel importante la dificultad de mantener el ritmo, la rima y la musicalidad del bengalí en lengua inglesa. Sobre todo, cuando la cultura musical occidental tiende a identificar tales expresiones musicales como monótonas.

En cuanto al contenido, podemos decir que estamos ante un texto vago, o que se quiere dejar de manera voluntaria así, porque no es claro si quien habla es un hombre o una mujer, ya que, en bengalí, salvo casos excepcionales, no existe el género gramatical. ¿Estamos frente a un texto de amor o a un canto ceremonial y religioso? ¿o ambos? ¿el narrador o narradora se está dirigiendo a su Dios o cuál Penélope sueña con su amor que vive lejos? La esposa que espera es una figura que se encuentra en muchas literaturas populares de la India. También hay que subrayar la capacidad indiscutible de Tagore para expresar con matices nuevos, algunos contenidos que están en las tradiciones populares. Si a esta habilidad se agrega la musicalidad del verso tagoriano podemos entender por qué su poesía fue tan difundida en India, incluso entre los analfabetos que conocen y cantan esos versos. Estamos simplemente ante el poeta que es el juglar que narra historias a través de cánticos sencillos y que por esa vía construye puentes entre las clases altas educadas y las bajas portadoras de sabidurías seculares que fueron oralmente transmitidas por generaciones.

En la poesía tagoriana hay un sentimiento de vinculación esencial con todo lo existente, ya sea personas, animales, plantas, sol, agua, etc. La lectura del “Gitanjali” nos lleva a una suerte de vivencia de lo esencial que nos hace sentir parte de la creación y en la que podemos acariciar la plenitud y la felicidad. Se nos mezcla el sentimiento de la libertad, con el amor por todo lo creado, una suerte de permanencia en un eterno presente, una sensación de inmensa ingravidez. Los textos que componen el Gitanjali nos llevan a un estado de trascendencia, de conexión con todo lo existente. Es ir más allá del ego, para identificarse con la unidad de la naturaleza y con la esencia de las personas. Los cambios en la naturaleza expresan transformaciones armónicas y que también suceden en cada uno de nosotros. La trascendencia nos llena de una paz interior que nos hace experimentar la unidad del universo, la totalidad cósmica. Ampliamos nuestra percepción de las formas, los sonidos, los colores, nos hace percibir la energía en sus múltiples formas, nos abre las puertas del éxtasis al hacernos uno con el universo y nos hace navegar en el más profundo íntasis, que no es sino el éxtasis al interior del individuo.

La dimensión trascendente de la poesía de Tagore nos lleva a la contemplación y a la meditación personal, a la ampliación y refinamiento sensorial de nuestros cinco sentidos, a desarrollar la capacidad de sentir amor por todos los seres. Tagore, quizás inadvertidamente, nos conduce a la aceptación incondicional de los otros seres que se hace a partir del respeto y de la horizontalidad en la cual reconocemos a cada integrante de nuestra comunidad como un “legítimo otro”.

Las recurrentes referencias a Dios en la poesía tagoriana, que tiene una lectura unívoca en la cultura occidental que solo nos hace pensar en lo divino, en lo perteneciente a Dios, en realidad es una invocación a lo sagrado. La trascendencia es movimiento de desarrollo humano que nos lleva a fusionarnos con la totalidad, con el infinito, en el que todo es sagrado y nada es profano.

Tomemos a Tagore y su obra literaria como un ejemplo inspirador para el Comité de Escritores y Escritoras por la Paz de PEN Internacional en los tiempos que viven. Concluyo este escrito con unos versos míos que surgieron hace algunos años después de haber leído el “Gitajali” por vez primera:

Soy un ser vivo  
y ahora fluye en mí la energía  
de toda mi vida precedente.  
Mi sueño de atrapar  
todos mis años  
en un instante ínfimo,  
que pueda caber en la plenitud  
de un átomo,  
hoy se hace realidad.

## **TAGORE'S „GITANJALI“, A HYMN TO LOVE AND PEACE BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS**

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life...

Thy infinite gifts come to me on these very small hands of mine.

Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

Canto 1 of Rabindranath Tagore's "Gitanjali".

As our eyes wander through the "Gitanjali" ("Song Offerings"), we realise that we are before a text that will never fade away. It is a collection of poems fertile in evocations and full of captivating harmonies, which reaches us with reverberations that make our souls vibrate. We are not accustomed in the West to read verses bearing images that bring to our eyes an ancestral culture, almost untouched in its secular and profound nature. Tagore is the one who magically opens the doors to the great spirituality of India.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta on 6 May 1861 into one of the richest families in Bengal, in an atmosphere of great spirituality. He died in the same city on 7 August 1941, so his life coincided entirely with the British rule over the so-called "Indian Empire" that extended between 1858 and 1947, over the territories we know today as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and part of Myanmar.

The India in which he lived was characterised by three constituent elements which, in one way or another, marked the society in which Rabindranath lived: English rule, which altered the productive processes of the local economy, which increased the abysmal poverty of the lower classes; Islam, which between the 10th and 19th centuries introduced an element of political unity and a unitary state; and pantheistic Hinduism, which expressed a deep spirituality, but which was more an archaic form of "religiosity" than a "religion."

From this historical situation modern India emerged, linked to the processes of urbanisation and the development of large cities. A melting pot was born where English ethical mores, veneration of the great masters and philosophers, and deep attachment to customs and traditions mingled, giving birth to the Western perception of India as the world centre of spirituality.

It is from these general conditions of existence prevailing in India in Tagore's time that we must understand the contents and aesthetics of his poetry. Both the ancient Indian literary tradition (particularly Bengali) and the English aesthetic influence of the second half of the 19th century in which he was trained are present in it. Tagore, who wrote in English and Bengali, expressed himself in ways not entirely proper to ancient Indian culture, but presented that culture in content and forms more accessible to educated Westerners.

With regard to the work. "Gitanjali," it is interesting to note that the Bengali version is written in verse and the English version, by Tagore himself, is in prose. It is well known how difficult it is to translate poetic works. Perhaps this is why Tagore opted for the English prose version in order to make himself better known in the West. This was in November 1912. The following year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In this exercise of adapting Bengali poetry (poetry composed to be sung and not read silently and intellectually as in Western cultures) into English prose, the difficulty of maintaining the rhythm, rhyme and musicality of Bengali in the English language most probably played an important role. Especially when Western musical culture tends to identify such musical expressions as monotonous.

As for the content, we can say that we are dealing with a vague text, or one that is voluntarily left as such, because it is not clear whether the speaker is a man or a woman, since in Bengali, with a few exceptions, there is no grammatical gender. Are we dealing with a text of love or a ceremonial and religious chant, or both? Is the narrator addressing his or her God or represents Penelope who is dreaming of her love who lives far away? The waiting wife is a figure found in many Indian folk literatures. Tagore's undisputed ability to express with new nuances some of the contents of popular traditions must also be underlined. If we add to this ability the musicality of Tagorean verse, we can understand why his poetry was so widespread in India, even among the illiterate who know and sing these verses. We are simply faced with the poet who is the minstrel who narrates stories through simple chants and thus builds bridges between the educated upper classes and the lower classes who carry centuries-old wisdoms that were orally passed down through the generations.

In Tagorian poetry there is a feeling of essential connectedness with all that exists, be it people, animals, plants, sun, water, etc. The reading of the "Gitanjali" leads us to a kind of personal experience of the essential that makes us feel part of creation and in which we can caress fullness and happiness. The feeling of freedom is mixed with the love for everything created, a kind of permanence in an eternal present, a sensation of immense weightlessness. The texts that make up the Gitanjali take us to a state of transcendence, of connection with all that exists. It is to go beyond the ego, to identify with the unity of nature and with the essence of people. The changes in nature express harmonious transformations that also happen in each one of us. Transcendence fills us with an inner peace that makes us experience the unity of the universe, the cosmic totality. It broadens our perception of shapes, sounds, colours, makes us perceive energy in its many forms, opens the gates of ecstasy by making us one with the universe and makes us navigate in the deepest "intasis", which is nothing but the ecstasy within the individual.

The transcendent dimension of Tagore's poetry leads us to contemplation and personal meditation, to the amplification and sensory refinement of our five senses, to develop the capacity to feel love for all beings. Tagore, perhaps inadvertently, leads us to the unconditional acceptance of other beings that comes from respect and horizontality in which we recognise each member of our community as a "legitimate being".

The recurrent references to God in Tagorian poetry, which has a univocal reading in Western culture that makes us think only of the divine (of what belongs to God), is in reality an invocation of the sacred. Transcendence is a movement of human development that leads us to merge with the totality, with the infinite, in which everything is sacred and nothing is profane.



Let us take Tagore and his literary work as an inspiring example for the Writers for Peace Committee of International PEN in the times ahead. I will conclude this writing with some verses of mine that came to me a few years ago after I read the “Gitajali” for the first time:

I am a living being  
and now flows in me the energy  
of all my previous life.  
My dream to catch  
all my years  
in a tiny instant,  
that can fit in the fullness  
of an atom,  
today becomes reality.

## IMAGINE: TYRANTS LOVE TO WRITE POETRY!

“Let art flourish, though the world perishes.”

- *Slogan of the Futurist*

The world was never entirely without war, peace was only interim.

I was 2 years old when my mother took her 5 children and got on the last airplane in Chongqing to fly to Taiwan in order to flee the war. My father has to stay on the Chinese Mainland to fight against the Communist Army. Months later the whole country fell into the hands of Mao Zedong and his Communist Party. As a war prisoner, my father spent more than 2 decades in jail and finally died in prison in the early 70s.

In my childhood in Taiwan, we were used to the siren, the vibrant sharp howler which was the warning that the People’s Liberation Air Forces were flying across the sea and throwing bombs on the island. People hurried to the dark wet bunker and huddled together. The sticky air, the suppressed vague whispers, and the horror-struck face of my mother irritated me. I began to cough and gasp violently for breath. People got nervous and started to complain about my behavior. Minutes and hours passed, and the alarm was cleared. Exhausted we returned home. This scenery repeated many times and it hounded me in my dreams till I grew up. In my college years, I learned about the Vietnam War, the boat people, the My Lai Massacre... followed the Cambodian genocide in the mid-70s.

I came to peaceful Europe. There were wars in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and even in the Balkans. I still felt safe, it seemed to me that all those terrors were far away.

The Russian-Ukraine war broke out in Europe, it has lasted more than a year, and there is no sign of ending. Living in Germany, the daily devastating war scenery, though only on screen, made me anxious and sad. On the other side of the globe, the Chinese government sends day after day military planes and frigates circling around the island of Taiwan. My childhood nightmare comes back.

After the second World War, Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) wrote the sentence: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Actually, Auschwitz continues in another form everywhere in the world. Adorno’s words seemed so pale and weak. Just imagine, the mass murderer Mao Zedong has written beautiful and heroic poems after millions of his countrymen died in the civil war. Furthermore, under Mao’s regime about 20 to 40 million Chinese died because of the great famine in the late 1950s and later in the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, people were reciting and chanting Mao’s verse. The poem below is among the most popular ones, written in 1961, in the middle of the famine.

## ODE TO THE PLUM BLOSSOM

Wind and rain escorted Spring's departure,  
Flying snow welcomes Spring's return.  
On the ice-clad rock rising high and sheer  
A flower blooms sweet and fair.  
Sweet and fair, she craves not Spring for herself alone,  
To be the harbinger of Spring she is content.  
When the mountain flowers are in full bloom  
She will smile mingling in their midst.

- official translation by the Foreign Language Press, Beijing

Genocides continued to happen in Rwanda, Myanmar, and Yemen. The cultural genocide is implemented in Tibet, South Mongolia, and against the Uighur in Xinjiang. No wonder, China's president Xi Jinping also writes poems, however, I will not read his poem to you, as I do not want to hurt your aesthetic feeling.

As a matter of fact, it is quite a phenomenon that tyrants love to write poetry. The Roman emperor Nero (37-68 AD) participated in poetry, song, and lyre-playing competitions. While his city burned to the ground, it was said that he was "... greatly delighted with the beauty of the flames." The Italian Futurist poeta, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), gloried in violence and even war. The Futurists exalted the dynamic and beauty of the modern, mechanical world. "Let art flourish, though the world perishes" was one of the Futurist's slogans.<sup>1</sup> Both Marinetti and the poet-warrior Gabriele D'Annunzio inspired the dictator Mussolini, so that his verse was "prone to mawkish," according to his biographer Richard Bosworth(1943-).

When Stalin was young, he loved poetry and could recite the Georgian epic "*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*" by heart. Later he read Goethe, Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman. As a 17 year old boy, Stalin wrote lyrics with tender and romantic motifs, e.g.

"The pinkish bud has opened,  
Rushing to the pale blue violet  
And, stirred by a light breeze,  
The lily of the valley has bent over the grass."<sup>2</sup>

Imagine, this sentimental young man who became a tyrant, who brought millions of people to death.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171025-why-tyrants-love-to-write-poetry>  
<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Merkelson, "Bad Politics, Worse Prose". *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved April 12, 2011.

Adolf Hitler's poem "*The Mother*" sounds very touching, and he composed it in 1923.

When your mother has grown older,  
When her dear, faithful eyes  
no longer see life as they once did,  
When her feet, grown tired,  
No longer want to carry her as she walks –  
Then lend her your arm in support,  
Escort her with happy pleasure.  
The hour will come when weeping, you  
Must accompany her on her final walk.  
And if she asks you something,  
Then give her an answer.  
And if she asks again, then speak!  
And if she asks yet again, respond to her,  
Not impatiently, but with gentle calm.  
And if she cannot understand you properly  
Explain all to her happily.  
The hour will come, the bitter hour,  
When her mouth asks for nothing more.

Yes, the bitter hour came to millions of people, young and old. Imagine, this cruel despot even had a tender feeling at least to his mother.  
Another example: guess who wrote the following love songs:

I am a supplicant for a goblet of wine  
from the hand of a sweetheart.  
In whom can I confide this secret of mine?  
Where can I take this sorrow?

XXXXXXXXXX

I have become imprisoned, O beloved, by the mole on your lip!  
I saw your ailing eyes and became ill through love...  
Open the door of the tavern and let us go there day and night,  
For I am sick and tired of the mosque and seminary.

Ayatollah Khomeini was the composer of these lines. Khomeini was the Supreme Leader of Iran and one of the most prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders, who issued on February 14th, 1989, a fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie and his publishers.

Imagine, almost at the same time, he published this poem in the *New Republic* in 1989!<sup>3</sup>)

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kalder, Dictator-lit: The poetry of Ayatollah Khomeini, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/jan/29/dictator-lit-ayatollah-khomeini>

## HOW TO WRITE TRUTH WITH CRUSHED GLASS?

John Lennon dreamed of a utopia, where there are no religious barriers, no national borders, and not even private property, that is, all the factors that cause human antagonism, none of them exist. Imagine a world full of selflessness, equality, and mutual love.

All the tyrants, dictators, murderers, and butchers also have dreams, dreams of nature, love, beauty, and even freedom, and they want to possess all these for themselves, but not for all the people, not for the world. One thing is for sure—the power of words, we writers know better than those hypocrites, we write with heart, conscience, and sense, and we do not only have dreams, with our words we can mobilise people to join us to uphold basic humanity and universal values.

2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023

You already feel, just looking helplessly at the images of war on TV, that each bank of this river has its own story and that the war has turned these two stories against each other. The truth is made of crushed glass. You don't see through it. That is why each bank of this river has its own forgetfulness. In order to write your story about oppression, about executioners and victims, you have to erase certain passages. You need to leave out exactly those parts on which the other bank rests. His deaths are your victories. Your deaths are his atrocities. His despotism is your noble cause of struggle for freedom, it is your despotism that no longer appears in the story. You quickly wipe it with the sponge, and now only the despotism on the other side is the center of your story. Your victories and his failure. That's it. He who listens to both stories gets a headache. To say the truth, you have to be silent.

Forgetting is necessary. Forgetting is a defense mechanism. I forgetfully crochet every line of my text. Poetry is broken glass. And like any defense mechanism, forgetting is a drug. You use it to clean out your skeletons in the closet. You use it to throw a few sandbags from the hot air balloon so it goes up. But what do you do when your cleanliness is someone else's wound? On the one hand, there is the desire to fight against forgetting in order to honor the victims and to prevent the atrocities from happening again. On the other hand, there is the obligation to forget so that you can continue your life.

What is this longing for a sanitization of our memory? How to be forced to constantly find a form of sublimation of powerless anger? How to write truth with crushed glass?

## IMAGINE A VERY FEW PEOPLE...

Can a person still listen to John Lennon's song without becoming nostalgic, also evoking many situations of that time, not only in Vietnam, Laos, Bangladesh, or the moon?... Against most expectations, and perhaps by paraphrasing the famous USA election slogan from 2008, I could reply: Yes, one can!

Seen from today's perspective, more than fifty years of distance, the lyrics cannot hide some incongruities anymore. At that time, all such incongruities seemed to be covered, or even wept, by the refrain "Imagine all the people", supported by vigorous battery beatings while the notes arise. Yet the tune keeps its beauty and hopefulness, and without both neither life nor literature are worth blooming. Moreover, such incongruities, like for instance "no religion too" or "a brotherhood of men" are in my opinion rather due to the pamphleteer character of the message. They could be easily corrected, or complemented, by a closer differentiation, led by the reading principle: Let us keep all this in mind as a mere tendency, a handful of proposals that would display a myriad of nuances, when they should grow on different soils, under different temperatures.

As a matter of fact, I suspect that many of us have open or secret nostalgia reservations. By the same token, I admit to having my own nostalgia temptations. They are clearly recognizable, such as the long period of "hot peace" (according to the former German Parliament VP Antje Vollmer, from the Green Party) after WW II until the 1990s. Some of us, having lived under dictatorship, had later the opportunity to enjoy freedom of expression, welfare state, health system, social security (all welfare factors that could not prevent existential anxiety yet). To sum it up with a worn-out slogan: We were happy and we did not realize it.

During the Balkan fratricide wars in the 1990s, when NATO members decided to bomb Belgrade without agreement of the UNO, many of us heard alarm bells. Some of us attended the PEN Congress in Belgrade 2011, when this issue was mentioned during the work at the "Belgrade Declaration", which happened to be a step towards the Bled Manifesto. While working at that text, which could be considered as a part of the history of the Bled Manifesto, I constantly had before my eyes the bombed buildings, wounds of the NATO bombings in the heart of Belgrade, which the Serbs decided to keep as a memorial against all wars.

All wars leave wounds. Can History be written before wounds become scars? I doubt it.

Let us go back to John Lennon's song: If we start to imagine "all the people living for today" – should it be a utopia? At the present, it seems to be a permanent nightmare. We see people fleeing their homes and seeking shelters, people fleeing their countries because they refuse to fight for obscure purposes, people fleeing their soils because rich countries and their corporations have made them into poisoned deserts, destroying their cultures and way of living. Is it hard to imagine that "there's no countries" when some military powers simply ignore the respect for frontiers since – well, can we recall it with precision?

Respect for a country's frontiers is a more than just claim. Yet in the geopolitical conundrum, as the result of the complicated fabric of globalization, it implies no

separations between History and geography, economics and politics; it does not allow the tearing apart of all aspects of the huge ecosystem in which we are all implicated. There is no way around this recognition in the 21st century. Each war is an environmental catastrophe, there is no option for PEN between the sword and the feather. Our founding father, H.G. Wells, published in the year of WW I, a book called *The War That Will End War*, which ended as an illusion. Claiming weapons from the comfort of the couch is a crime against Gaia. Claiming cease-fire and negotiations is an act of courage. Gandhi knew, that sooner or later he would pay for that.

I prefer sticking to the assertion by Margaret Mead, who wrote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." According to this, I imagine a very few people singing another Lennon song: All we are saying, is give peace a chance...



## AMBIGUÏTÉS DU PACIFISME ET DE L'APOLITISME

Les Pen Clubs sont nés aux lendemains de la première guerre mondiale terriblement meurtrière pour réunir par-delà les frontières les écrivains — poètes, dramaturges, essayistes, éditeurs, romanciers — dont les nations s'étaient combattues. Un peu dans l'optique de l'utopie, courante à l'époque, du « plus jamais ça ».

Ce contexte explique aisément que les deux principes à la base de ce cercle littéraire international aient été le pacifisme et l'apolitisme. En France, l'un des premiers à le rejoindre fut en effet Romain Rolland, internationaliste convaincu, dont le manifeste Au-dessus de la mêlée publié en septembre 1914 dans le Journal de Genève fit scandale.

Après la guerre de 14, le pacifisme emporte de nombreuses convictions. On a beaucoup exalté l'humanisme de Romain Rolland, mais on oublie qu'au-dessus de la mêlée condamne indistinctement tous les belligérants et par là même oublie que seule l'Allemagne, en envahissant la Belgique, a violé le droit international. Plus tard, sans doute sous l'influence de sa femme russe, Romain Rolland fut prosoviétique inconditionnel et refusa d'accepter le livre de Panaït Istrati Vers l'autre flamme qui décrivait l'arbitraire et la tyrannie découverts par l'écrivain roumain lors de son voyage en Union soviétique. De plus, Romain Rolland ne dissimulait pas son antipathie pour les juifs. Dans La Foire sur la place, cinquième tome de Jean-Christophe, il montre ainsi Wagner arrivant à Paris, « écoeuré par le milieu littéraire où les juifs sont trop nombreux ». Et dans le septième tome, intitulé Dans la maison, le héros apprécie certains aspects de la civilisation française, mais un juif viendra tout gêner... Il s'agit de Lévy-Cœur (dans lequel les contemporains ont reconnu Léon Blum) qui tient des propos sacrilèges sur Wagner. Jean-Christophe le gifle, puis refusera toute réparation sous forme de duel avec le juif. « Le héros est las de ses expériences avec la race d'Israël... Ils veulent faire de la France une Judée... Les juifs sont comme les femmes, excellents quand on les tient en bride, mais leur domination à ceux-ci et à celles-là est exécrable ». Et enfin, si Rolland finit par rejoindre le camp des dreyfusards, il ne se départira jamais de ses critiques contre la trop grande importance qu'on attache à cette affaire qui porte atteinte à l'honneur de l'armée.

Ces citations sont accablantes. Mais comme le notait André Rossel-Kirschen dans un article paru en 2005 : «... dans Jean-Christophe à côté de la caricature de Lucien Lévy-Cœur on trouve de nombreux juifs sympathiques. Rolland écrit de son héros : «il n'aimait pas les Juifs ; mais il aimait encore moins les antisémites...» ».

Pour en revenir au Pen Club, l'histoire de l'association montre que le principe de l'apolitisme s'est révélé très rapidement intenable, ou du moins difficilement applicable. À peine deux ans après la création du Pen Club, lors du premier congrès international réunissant à Londres en mai 1923 treize pays, la délégation allemande représentée par Gerhart Hauptmann, signataire du « Manifeste des 93 » qui niait en octobre 1914 les exactions perpétrées par l'armée allemande, notamment en Belgique, était exclue par le veto de la section belge. D'autres exemples avec les Pen Clubs italien et allemand dans les années trente illustrent le caractère idéaliste pour ne pas dire idéologique de l'apolitisme.

Sans aller jusqu'à affirmer que tout est politique, on peut difficilement prétendre que la mobilisation contre un État qui bride la liberté d'expression n'est pas politique. La défense des écrivains contre la censure touche évidemment la politique culturelle de l'État, et la cité peut difficilement ignorer le reflet que lui propose la littérature. Même la littérature de divertissement qui s'inscrit dans un contexte social et national auquel la politique participe n'y échappe pas ! L'expérience montre que la lutte politique ne peut être exclue des Pen Clubs. La Charte de Pen Club International stipule en effet à la fois que « les membres de la Fédération... s'engagent à faire tout leur possible... pour répandre l'idéal d'une humanité vivant en paix dans un monde uni » (art. 2) et que « chacun de ses membres a le devoir de s'opposer à toute restriction de la liberté d'expression dans son propre pays... aussi bien que dans le monde entier... » (Art. 4). Et encore : « Le Pen affirme sa conviction que le progrès nécessaire du monde vers une meilleure organisation politique et économique rend indispensable une libre critique des gouvernements et des institutions. » Entre l'apolitisme et la libre critique des gouvernements, la marge de manœuvre semble pour le moins réduite ...

Par le simple fait de « répandre l'idéal d'une humanité vivant en paix », pour reprendre les termes de la Charte, les membres de l'association ne peuvent se heurter qu'à des adversaires. Le faire dans la paix et la concorde semble particulièrement difficile surtout si l'adversaire tient à imposer son point de vue en adoptant des moyens violents. La violence est de ce monde — on peut le déplorer, mais on ne peut pas toujours l'éviter. On peut adopter le point de vue d'un Gandhi, mais ceux à qui nous nous confrontons feront-ils de même ? Le réalisme nous oblige à prendre la mesure de l'intrication profonde du politique et de la réalité. De plus, aux yeux de tout pouvoir réfractaire à la manifestation des désaccords, voire des oppositions, la libre critique sera toujours pénétrée de politique.

En 1914, le combat pacifiste de Romain Rolland pour qui « la guerre impérialiste est une conséquence inévitable, et, l'on peut même dire, une condition du système capitaliste » est un combat mené au nom de l'internationalisme. En 1939, face au nazisme, il ne s'oppose pas à la guerre, même s'il la déplore. Même un pacifiste considère qu'il y a des guerres justes...

Tout a dérapé bien avant les accords de Munich, quand Hitler arrive au pouvoir. À ce moment-là des personnes de très bonne foi veulent préserver la paix. Bien sûr, 80 ans après ces événements c'est facile à dire, mais face à un pouvoir comme celui d'Hitler, un minimum de lucidité suffisait pour comprendre qu'on ne pouvait pas ne pas risquer une guerre mondiale, et que souhaiter la paix avec Hitler revenait à accepter sa domination. Je cite souvent l'exemple suivant qui m'a beaucoup frappé : en 1934, Le Petit Parisien a rendu compte des conditions dans lesquelles des communistes étaient assassinés à Dachau. Il se trouve que mon père était munichois, et je me suis toujours demandé pourquoi il n'avait pas été alerté par ce reportage, et plus largement, comment, ayant connaissance de ces faits, on pouvait être munichois quatre ans après.

C'est vrai qu'à l'époque, l'information ne se diffusait pas de la même manière. Aujourd'hui elle est reprise par les radios, la télévision, les réseaux sociaux, et on en



## PEACE AS A HUMAN RIGHT: 25 PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE PEACE

a forcément un écho. Il n'en reste pas moins qu'avoir été munichois est une erreur politique très grave que beaucoup de personnes ont commise. Quand Daladier qui vient de signer les accords de Munich sous la pression de l'opinion publique atterrit sur le tarmac de l'aéroport du Bourget et que les Français venus à sa rencontre l'applaudissent, il s'exclame : « les cons ! » ... Donc Munich était une erreur énorme mais tout avait commencé avant. Là, pour moi, le pacifisme s'est rendu coupable à jamais. Et c'est cette période de l'Histoire qui m'a donné la conviction que lutter pour la paix à tout prix est toujours ambigu.

La guerre de 14 comme l'a dit par exemple Anatole France, était une boucherie voulue par les industriels. Être pacifiste en 1914, cela se justifiait.

Mais ça ne se justifiait plus vingt ans après quand on avait pris la mesure de ce qu'était l'hitlérisme. Mais qui l'avait fait réellement ? Les opposants allemands, bien sûr, communistes, juifs, puisque toutes les oppositions avaient été muselées. Il est difficile de se remettre dans l'ambiance de l'époque et je me suis toujours demandé si j'aurais été pacifiste ou pas. Je pense que je ne l'aurais pas été. En tout cas, après coup, Munich apparaît comme un moment clé pour prendre la mesure de l'ambiguïté du pacifisme. En quelque sorte pour se guérir du pacifisme... Des années 20 jusqu'à ce jour en passant par la guerre froide, l'histoire des rapports du Pen Club français - et plus largement des Pen européens et latins - avec les Pen Clubs anglais, américains et nordiques montre une nette séparation, pour ne pas dire une ligne de fracture, à propos de la notion d'apolitisme. Les premiers, considérant dès les débuts où ils se méfient des positions marquées à gauche d'Anatole France et Romain Rolland, que les Français font de la politique alors qu'eux n'en font pas...

Je pense qu'il faut chercher la raison de cette ligne de fracture dans l'Histoire. Marqués par leur Révolution et le jacobinisme, les Français sont plus que méfiants envers le pacifisme et l'apolitisme. De plus, la Révolution française a organisé notre vie politique sur la base de deux camps opposés l'un à l'autre. En Angleterre et aux États-Unis, les consciences n'ont pas été façonnées de la même manière.

L'expérience montre que la promotion de l'apolitisme revient toujours à accepter le monde tel qu'il est, à cautionner le système existant, à ne pas exercer son droit de critique.

The motto of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, *Pax Optima Rerum*<sup>4</sup>, peace is the highest good, reminds us that even after the monstrous Thirty-Years' War with its eight million deaths, peace could be re-established in Europe by diplomatic negotiation. There were no victors

In the post-World War II world, the United Nations Charter serves as a universal constitution, a rules based international order, equipped with various fora for peaceful settlement of disputes.

Pursuant to article 2, paragraph 3, of the Charter there is a treaty-based obligation to sit down and negotiate. Intransigence is not an option. Article 39 of the Charter gives the Security Council the competence to determine when an action or omission constitutes a threat or breach of international peace and security. Indeed, the *animus* to provoke and the refusal to dialogue constitute such a threat of the peace.

Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits not only the use of force, but also the threat of the use of force. Concretely this means, that every provocation is a threat to be avoided.

My 25 Principles of International Order, initially presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March of 2018, and republished in my book "Building a Just World Order" (2021)<sup>5</sup>, declare that peace is an enabling human right, the precondition to the enjoyment of all other human rights -- civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

**Principle 1** stipulates that Peace is not the peace of cemeteries, as in Tacitus' *Agricola, solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* (make a wasteland and then call it peace). The United Nations Charter commits all States to actively promote *Peace with Justice*. The Preamble and articles 1 and 2 of the Charter stipulate that the principal goal of the Organization is the promotion and maintenance of peace. This entails the **prevention** of local, regional and international conflict, and in case of armed conflict, the deployment of effective measures aimed at peace-making, reconstruction and reconciliation.... The motto of the International Labour Organization deserves being recognized as the universal motto for our time: *si vis pacem, cole justitiam* (if you want peace, cultivate justice).

**Principle 18** stipulates that non-intervention constitutes customary international law. No State may organize, assist, foment, finance, incite or tolerate subversive, terrorist or armed activities directed towards the violent overthrow of the regime of another State, or interfere in civil strife in another State.

**Principle 19** stipulates that States must refrain from interfering in matters within the internal jurisdiction of another State, and may not resort to economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another State in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights.

4 A. de Zayas, "Peace" in William Schabas, ed. *Cambridge Companion to International Criminal Law*, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 97-116.

5 <https://www.claritypress.com/product/building-a-just-world-order/>

## IMAGINE ALL THE PEOPLE: WHAT KIND OF SOCIAL ORDER WOULD FOSTER PEACE

Admittedly, the promotion of human rights is a crucial international responsibility, as there is an *erga omnes* obligation of States parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to ensure their enforcement. However, this legitimate concern must not be hijacked to advance imperialist agendas.

The relentless war-mongering and incitement to hatred practiced by some states with the active support of the mainstream media contravenes the letter and spirit of the UN Charter. Such incitement contravenes Article 20 of the ICCPR.

We writers for peace have a special responsibility to craft peace initiatives and to advance understanding through our writings – essays, novels, poetry in the spirit of Wilfred Owen and his “Anthem to Doomed Youth” and Erich Maria Remarque’s novel “All Quiet on the Western Front”. We must never lend our pens to war-mongering or incitement to hatred.

A world at peace is one based on international cooperation and solidarity. Let us recall the language of the preamble of the UNESCO constitution, which affirms the common belief “in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge”. The preamble goes on to affirm a determination “to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives.” More poignantly Article 6 stipulates “that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

*By Prof. Dr. Alfred de Zayas, former UN Independent Expert on International Order 2012-18, former Secretary of the UN Human Rights Committee, member of the Board of the Geneva International Peace Research Institute, Professor of international law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy*

We know the answer: To live in peace, nations need democracy, an independent judiciary protecting human and civil rights as well as law and order, a free press, strong institutions and not too much inequality. The more poignant question is: Why do we ask this question? Why do we doubt – or pretend to do so – the trivial truths of the democratic peace theory? Ukraine is attacked by Russia precisely because Ukrainians after the collapse of the Soviet Union embraced democracy. Russia is able to wage its criminal war of aggression precisely because Putin rolled back all democratic developments in Russia, suppressed all opposition, the independent judiciary, the press, and any other form of free speech. The fact that this war might, as polls suggests, be supported by a majority of Russians proves nothing as long as there is no free press to correctly inform about this war, no freedom of speech to discuss its justification, and no free elections to vote out of office a government that illegally invaded one’s neighbor. Ironically, even the Kremlin’s rhetoric supports the democratic peace theory, because it brands Ukraine as the enemy not for what it is, a fledgling democracy, but for what it demonstrably is not: a fascist regime. It’s the same all over the world: very few authoritarian regimes make do without the trappings of some form of democracy and parliamentarism, lest without the semblance of an independent judiciary. The dictators know exactly how democracy and justice, and democracy and justice alone, legitimize power and pacify societies. How come then that citizens of democracies seem prone to forget what makes their societies peaceful? Why do we all too often ask ourselves questions the answer to which war-criminals like Putin know as perfectly well as Iran’s Mullahs or Arabia’s Princes?

The coward in all of us (immortal yet, as Shakespeare observed, dying more than once), may well be intimidated by the undeniable power of actual or potential imperialist aggressors like Russia or China; hoping against all experience that predators on the prowl can be appeased by pacifism observed by their prey. Or we may fear the long arm of state sponsored terror by regimes like Iran’s – not without reason but foolishly clinging to the vain hope that duck and cover could spare us. But how does this fear of bullies turn into doubt of the universal value of our freedoms? What is so desirable about oppression that we tend to excuse it with arguments of respect for cultural diversity? How come that citizens of the freest societies often seem to cherish their freedom less than those suffering under dictatorship? Why are authoritarian, anti-liberal politicians like Erdogan, Trump or Orban successful in democratic elections even while laying the ax to the institutional roots of democracy? And why do we ask ourselves soul-searching questions like “What kind of social order would foster peace?” when none of us would voluntarily choose to live in anything less than a liberal democracy with an independent judiciary, free press, and non-corrupted institutions? Why, in short, are we ashamed or afraid to proudly stand for the values – and, crucially, their universality! – enshrined in the United Nations Charter? Or, for that matter, in our own, the PEN Charter?

## UNA CANCIÓN EN MI VENTANA

Esta mañana una canción en mi ventana. De resplandor opalino. Sonriente. Eleva la voz. Interpreta el mundo. Trata de construirlo tal vez. O imaginarlo. En su modulación se agita el aire. Lo toma. Ha decidido transformarse en viento-huracán-suspiro. Brillar. Bailar.

La canción baila como si lo único que existiera fuera su melodía. Se despliega. Como el arco iris. Se explaya. Como si no existiera la tristeza. Ondeada. Como si estuviera en el paraíso. En una dimensión desconocida ... etérea ... misteriosa ...

Gira. Continúa danzando. Se acerca cada vez más. Entra en mi habitación y tropieza con el fuego. Con sus destellos salvajes. Resplandores-alborotos. Fulgores iniciáticos que viven en mi casa. Aquí. Conmigo. Desde el día en que el fuego rodó desde una estrella. Cayó sobre mis nubes. Tejió un nido aquí. Sobre mi arena. La canción está fascinada por este resplandor. Su calidez. Se baña en su luz. Su exuberancia. E inventa una danza distinta ... salvaje ... extraña ...

Luego se dilata. Emite sonidos de fuego. Tal vez tiene la intención de destruir-reconstruir el mundo. Impulsarlo a renacer. A ser Phenix. Se extiende en el horizonte. Inflamada. Pero el horizonte está empapado de lluvia. En sus gotas ruedaRuedaRueda. Se convierte en lluvia. Y descubre el baile del agua. La perfección. Ese abrazo entre el cielo y la tierra. Cae desde el cielo. Sube. Desciende. Ascende. Como si el agua fuera todo. Y todo volviera al agua transparente ... celeste ... arcana ...

La canción se transmuta en arroyo. Rápido. Cascada. Posiblemente busca imaginar un mundo perfecto. Un cosmos de agua. Se apresura a beber su transparencia. Atravesar su secreto. Y cae en sus reflejos. Reflejos múltiples. Espejeando un mosaico de lugares cercanos-lejanos. Campos. Valles. Desiertos. Selvas. Es el vaivén de la naturaleza. La canción quiere atravesar el espejo. Ser parte de la sangre de la tierra ilimitada ... inquieta ... sibilina ...

En ese horizonte encuentra la dicha del sueño. Entonces decide soñar. Entrever un mundo de ensueño. Vestido de claridades. Del misterio de la profundidad. Con la magnitud del océano. La frescura de las olas que se levantan y rompen con plenitud. Con el rumor de la espuma. El meneo de corales en el flujo-reflujo marino. La canción quiere bailotear con el mar. En la playa. En todas las playas del planeta. La arena se levanta y sopla hasta esbozar un camino firme ... niveo ... luengo ...

De repente el sueño desea soñar. Soñar con la diafanidad. Con las cumbres en donde viven dioses sin nombre. Divinidades eternas. Meciéndose en la hamaca del sol. El sueño quiere soñar con la canción. Con su belleza. Traducirla a todos los idiomas existentes-inexistentes. Soñarla tarareando la naturaleza.

El sueño quiere volar con el canto. Sobrevolar un mundo sin fronteras. Las tierras de aquí y allá. La selva de los continentes. Sobrevolar los días y las noches. En un tiempo sin tiempo. Con alas de cóndor. Alas desplegadas ... desmedidas ... inefables ...

Con el impulso del vuelo la canción abre los ojos. Se despierta. Está embriagada. Se detiene en lo alto de las nubes. Y contempla el mundo que ha imaginado-anhelado-forjado. Un mundo de paz. Felicidad. Armonía.

En el aire resuenan todas las melodías. En el fuego relumbra el amor. En el agua borbotea la vida. En el fondo del paisaje descuella una amplia sonrisa. Es la esperanza ofreciéndose al ser humano. A los pueblos.

Esta mañana una canción frente a mi ventana.  
El estremecimiento de un sueño baila con ella.  
La canción se desnuda.  
Levanta la voz.  
Y cantaCantaCanta

Imagine all the people  
Living life in peace  
Imagine all the people  
Sharing all the world  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today

Ginebra, marzo, 2023



## CAN ARTS STOP A BULLET?

PEN Melbourne's WfPC is collaborating with the peace activist movement and the campaign to free Julian Assange.

At a recent "Call for Peace, Truth Not War" rally, colourful signs, banners and the thumping beat of Richie Haven's Freedom on the stepped forecourt of Melbourne's State Library reminded me of how once we stopped a war. Music and art are powerful, they make us feel.

In Can Art Stop a Bullet? by Street and Cantwell, artist William Kelly articulates the thoughts of some of the world's most influential thinkers and artists about how art can contribute to humanity's desire for peace.

"The military has their tanks, bombs, battleships, and drones. They have their honour rolls of war, their medals, their 'heroes'. They have their statues, monuments, and triumphal arches – dedicated to conflict – and they have their weapons. I have a pencil."

- William Kelly

As the new AUKUS military alliance of the UK, US and Australia prepares for a possible war with China, I believe the scope of Writers for Peace must be broad enough to include every form of writing and art that speaks up for our humanity.

In Melbourne, the home of Julian Assange, a recent collaboration involved a joint venture with Melbourne City Council. They provided us with a site for the exhibition of Anything To Say?, a bronze life size sculpture by artist Davide Dormino of Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, each standing on a chair, with a fourth 'Empty Chair' for the public to 'have a say'. At the public event, the father of Julian Assange, John Shipton, David McBride, a whistle-blower who exposed Australian war crimes in Afghanistan, Councillor Dr. Olivia Ball, and Dean Yates, the former Reuters chief in Iraq at the time of the Collateral Murders, joined PEN Melbourne's Chris McKenzie and Dr Jo Scicluna in forcefully calling for Julian's release and the fundamental right of freedom of expression.

Peace education and children's literature is another area of interest for our WfPC. We must counter the glorification of killing. In Homer's Iliad, the sirens that lure sailors to their death are not seducing them with heavenly enchantments of peace and tranquillity, no, their irresistible lures sing of the glory of war. Militarism is deeply set in a culture of anthems, military songs and music. Movies, books and art idolize militaristic bravery, heroism, and the willingness to kill.

As co-author of an anti-war novel Earthrunner and the War of Water, I have been giving talks in schools about the futility of war and urging students to claim their agency for a peaceful future. In Australia, conscription for a war with China has already been flagged in the media; taxes being used for exorbitantly priced nuclear submarines are depriving urgently needed affordable housing, medical care, and

education; and the reality of becoming a nuclear target because of US bases in Australia, must all be known.

Combating climate disaster is an essential part of this work too. PEN Melbourne Writers for Peace has been working within the Independent Peaceful Australia Network to organise peace rallies and to include environmental organisations. The urgency to reverse climate warming was highlighted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres with a final warning for "climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once." Yet global military conflicts are a real and present danger to climate action. The hidden carbon footprint of the world's militaries was estimated at 6% of global emissions, excluding emissions caused by war and the reconstruction required afterwards.

For teachers seeking to incorporate peace into their programs, the Peace Literacy Institute <https://www.peaceliteracy.org/> offers free curriculum resources and some online training programs which are worth investigating.

John Lennon's words "Imagine all the people, livin' life in peace" continue to challenge us all as writers.

## JE LENNONOVA VIZIJA SPLOH URESNIČLJIVA?

Jeseni 1918, tik pred koncem prve svetovne vojne, je bila v literarni reviji Ljubljanski zvon objavljena črtica z naslovom Človek našega časa, katere avtor, sodeč po psevdonimu, naj bi bil pisatelj France Bevk, med vojno tudi sam vojak.

V zgodbi se neimenovani človek po smrti znajde v peklu, kar pa ga ne posebno moti, čeprav ga postavijo v kotel z vrelo smolo in obesijo na noge nad ogenj. Grešnik ugotovi namreč, da je življenje v peklu znosnejše kot tisto na zemlji, kjer ljudje nebrzdano uporabljajo sredstva za množično uničevanje, od strupenih plinov do minometov in težkih topov, da ne govorimo o bombah najrazličnejših vrst.

Na hude grehe na zemlji spominja seveda tudi 700 let prej napisani Pekel Danteja Alighierija, v epu Božanska komedija, ki prav tako meče slabo luč na tostransko življenje. Jean-Paul Sartre v drami Za zaprtimi vrati, napisani med naslednjo, drugo svetovno vojno (leta 1944, tik pred osvoboditvijo Pariza), se prav tako loteva razmerja med tostranstvom in »domovino večnosti«, vendar z drugačnimi poudarki. Vsem tem delom - v bistvu pa jih je veliko več, ki obravnavajo to tematiko - je skupno to, da odslikavajo svet, v katerem je premalo strpnosti. Prav to pa je vzrok, da vedno bolj prevladuje »temna noč duše« oziroma, kot trdi Sartre, da »so peklo ljudje okoli nas«.

Tudi v Lennonovi pesmi Imagine je omenjen peklo («Pod nami ni pekla, nad nami le nebo...»), za razliko od prej navedenih del pa v njej vejeta upanje in optimizem. Imagine je pravzaprav manifest »idealne« družbe, kjer »nobenega ne ubijaš, niti ne umreš za to«. Tako kot je bila pesem aktualna ob nastanku, v času vojne v Indokini, lahko rečemo enako za čas pred njo in po njej, vključno z današnjim trenutkom.

V sedanjem svetu, ki ponovno gori od vojn, bi lahko pesem imela odličen mobilizacijski naboj. Lahko bi spet postala geslo mirovnega gibanja oziroma tistih, ki se ne strinjajo s tem, da je vojna sredstvo za reševanje sporov. Zdi pa se, da je mirovno gibanje v tem trenutku prešibko oziroma neizrazito v primerjavi z gibanji, ki so imela prepoznavno vlogo nekaj desetletij nazaj, v času blokofske razdelitve sveta, recimo v sedemdesetih in še bolj v osemdesetih letih. Kar je še huje pa je to, da prepuščamo odločitve vladam in mednarodnim ustanovam. Civilna družba ostaja premalo glasna.

Čeprav se deklarativno vsi strinjamo, da je potreben »tuzemski« mir, se povsem ločimo po tem, kako doseči ta cilj. Očitno pojmujejo nekateri mir kot stanje v filmu Dan potem iz »davnega« 1983; mir takrat res nastopi, vendar svet je že opustošen. Mirovno gibanje je v bistvu razdeljeno, saj znotraj njega prihaja do spopada med različnimi »dušami«, ki ga sestavljajo.

Tudi prej navedena črtica iz leta 1918 se v nadaljevanju, tako kot Imagine, dotika tudi drugih negativnih pojavov, ne samo vojne. V prvi vrsti nasilnega prevrata znotraj družbe oziroma poskusov, da do njega pride, kar da je prvi korak do »resničnega pekla«. S tem želi pisec opozoriti, da je vojna le ena od oblik nasilja. Z odsotnostjo vojne je namreč nasilje še vedno prisotno v drugih sferah družbe, tako v fizični kot latentni obliki: od psihološkega trpinčenja do pranja možganov, propagandističnih manipulacij, groženj, izsiljevanja, ipd.

Na prvi pogled se zdi, da Imagine, v trenutku, ko človeštvo morda drvi proti tretji svetovni vojni, deluje le kot oblič. Lennonova želja, izražena v »predstavljam si vse ljudi, ki žive v miru«, je namreč lepa, ampak težko izvedljiva. Za njeno realizacijo se moramo najprej vprašati, kako izkoreniniti različne oblike nasilja, ki prevladujejo v družbi. Golo nasprotovanje vojni oz. vojnem, ker ne gre le za eno (t.i. pacifizem), namreč ni dovolj. Potrebno je namreč mirovniški pristop, ki pa zajema bistveno širše področje: mirovno vzgojo, nasprotovanje večanju vojaških izdatkov in vsemu, kar generira nasilje. Takšen pristop pa je povezan z nekim drugim pojavom, to je nenasiljem, ki ne zajema zgolj državljansko neposlušnost, ampak tudi solidarnost s šibkimi... kar se že približuje viziji Johna Lennona.

Vendar vse to so v tem trenutku zelo ambiciozni cilji, čeprav neobhodno potrebni. V najboljšem primeru je zato Imagine spodbuda, izhodišče za nekaj, kar se šele poraja. Če se sploh lahko porodi.



## IS LENNON'S VISION AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

In the autumn of 1918, just before the end of the First World War, a short story whose title translates as "A Man of Our Time" appeared in the Slovenian literary magazine *Ljubljanski zvon*. Its author, judging from the pseudonym under which it was published, is believed to have been the writer France Bevk, who had himself served as a soldier in the war.

In this story, an unnamed man dies and goes to hell, a fact that does not seem to particularly bother him even though he is placed in a cauldron of boiling pitch and hung by his feet over a fire. The unnamed sinner comes to realise, in fact, that life in hell is more bearable than life on earth, where people make unbridled use of weapons of mass destruction, from poison gases to howitzers and heavy cannon, not to mention all manner of bombs.

Serious sins committed on earth are also recalled, of course, in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, the first part of his epic *Divine Comedy*, written some 700 years earlier, which likewise shows life on this side of the veil in a negative light. Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*, written during the next world war (in 1944, just before the liberation of Paris), is another work that addresses the relationship between this life and the "homeland of eternity", although with other emphases. Common to all these works – and the many others that address this theme – is the fact that they depict a world in which there is too little tolerance. This is the reason why the "dark night of the soul" increasingly prevails or, as Sartre puts it, "Hell is other people".

Hell is also mentioned in John Lennon's song "Imagine" ("No hell below us / Above us, only sky"). Unlike the other works mentioned, however, this song contains hope and optimism. "Imagine" is actually a manifesto for an "ideal" society in which there is "Nothing to kill or die for." Just as the song was topical when it was written – during the Vietnam War – we could say the same for the periods before and after it, including the present moment.

In today's world, which is once again consumed by wars, this song could play an important mobilising role. It could once again become a slogan of the peace movement, or of those who do not agree that war is the way to resolve disputes. It seems, however, that at present the peace movement is too weak or passive in comparison to those that played a prominent role in past decades, when the world was divided into competing blocs, such as in the 1970s and, even more so, the 1980s. Even worse than this, though, is the fact that we are leaving decisions to governments and international institutions. Civil society has become too quiet.

Although we all agree in principle that we need "peace on earth," we are utterly divided about how this goal is to be achieved. Some people seem to understand peace as the situation portrayed in the television film *The Day After* from "way back" in 1983, where a ceasefire is indeed declared, but the world has already been devastated. Today the peace movement is essentially divided by an internal conflict among the different "souls" that make it up.

Like "Imagine", the aforementioned short story from 1918 also mentions other negative phenomena besides war. In the first place, violent revolution within society,

or attempts to bring such a revolution about, which is the first step to "true hell." The writer's aim is to warn that war is only one form of violence. In the absence of war, violence is still present in other spheres of society, in both physical and latent forms: from psychological torture to brainwashing, manipulation through propaganda, threats, blackmail, and so on.

At first glance it may seem that "Imagine," in a moment in which humanity is apparently hurtling towards a third World War, is no more than a plaster. Lennon's wish, expressed by the words "Imagine all the people / Living life in peace", is a fine sentiment, but one that is hard to achieve. In order to realise it, we must first ask ourselves how to eradicate the various forms of violence that dominate our society. Mere pacifist opposition to war – or wars, because there is never only one – is not enough. What is required is a pacifist approach that covers a significantly broader field, including education for peace and opposition to increases in military expenditure and everything that generates violence. Such an approach is linked to another phenomenon, that of non-violence, which not only covers civil disobedience but also solidarity with the weak . . . something that is already closer to John Lennon's vision.

These are all very ambitious goals in the present moment, but they are absolutely necessary. In the best-case scenario, then, "Imagine" can be a stimulus, a starting point for something that is just beginning to come into being. If only we let it.

## PREDSTAVLJAJTE SI

Če prodaš neznano hišo,  
prodaš nepremičnino.

Če prodaš hišo staršev,  
prodaš nekaj drugega: gradnjo,  
(tudi opeko, eno za drugo  
sta oblikovala s svojimi rokami  
v bližnji opekarni),  
skromnost in varčnost svojih staršev,  
otroški jok, odraščanje,  
obiske vnukov in vseh sorodnikov,  
obdelovanje vrta, pogovore s sosedi,  
prve češnje in solato, ki gre  
včasih v cvet.  
Osir v dimniku,  
kuhanje marmelade,  
obiranje kamilic,  
malin in jagod,  
marelico ob zidu,  
pomite kozarce,  
zložene na stalaži v kleti.  
Petje med likanjem,  
šivanje zaves,  
mésenje testa,  
kuhanje borovničevca ...  
izlete na morje,  
ko se z vrha hriba zalesketa  
morska gladina.  
Spomine shraniš v škatle  
in nanje napišeš  
letnice.

Odrežeš korenine svojim otrokom –  
tudi oni bodo videli le denar,  
pokazal si jim, kaj ti je pomembno.

Če prodaš hišo svojih staršev,  
prodaš dom:  
kam se boš vrnil na obisk,  
Ahasver?

Eden iz pohlepa prodaja dom,  
drugi pa si rešuje golo življenje,  
od doma beži in že ne ve,  
če dom sploh še stoji.

Koliko porušenih domov,  
koliko družin beži za življenje,  
koliko natrganih vezi,  
koliko čakajočih ljudi,  
da bodo lahko šli, spet šli  
domov.

**Predstavljajte si** vse te ljudi.

Vrata odpri, razpri roke za vse otroke,  
kako bi radi, kako radi domov.  
Ponudi srce, roko in krov.

Predstavljajte si,  
kako si vsakdo želi domov ...  
kako svobodno hiti, kako ni meja,  
glej, pravkar bo doma.

Saj  
tu in doma te nekdo rad ima.

*V Ljubljani, marca 2023*

LIDIJA GOLC (PEN SLOVENIA)

## IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT

When you sell a stranger's house  
you're selling real estate.

When you sell your parents' house  
you're also selling something else:  
their work and effort  
(each brick hand-made  
at the nearby furnace),  
their modesty and providence,  
their children's cries and growing pains,  
their grandchildren's visits,  
tending to the garden, talks with neighbours,  
ripened cherries and the lettuce in fruit.  
Wasps blocking the chimney,  
stirring the jam over a low flame,  
gathering chamomile flowers  
raspberries and strawberries,  
the apricot tree by the wall,  
the washed jars on the basement shelf.  
Singing songs while ironing,  
curtains to be sewed,  
dough to be kneaded,  
spirit to be distilled ...  
trips to the coast,  
when the steep forest opens up  
to a view of the glistening shoreline.  
Memories to be saved in a box,  
boxes to be sorted by years.

When you cut your children's roots -  
they will only ever see the money,  
then you have demonstrated,  
what matters most.

When you sell your parents' house  
you sell your home:  
where will you return to,  
Ahasuerus?

One is selling their home out of greed,  
another is running from it,  
escaping with their bare life,  
not knowing  
whether it still stands.

How many homes in ruins,  
how many families running for their lives,  
how many broken bonds,  
how many people waiting to go,  
to go back  
to their home.

Imagine for a moment all these people.

Open the doors wide, offer your embrace  
to all the children  
who want to come back, who just want to be home.  
Offer your heart, offer your hand,  
offer the roof over your head.

Imagine, if you will,  
how each of us yearns for home  
in a joyful, carefree hurry,  
which knows no borders,  
look, we're almost there.

For  
here as well as home,  
someone really cares.

*Translated by Andraž Golc  
Ljubljana, March 2023*

## QUAND LES HOMMES VIVRONT D'AMOUR

Imagine... La chanson de John Lennon a eu un colossal succès planétaire. Elle avait certes une mélodie simple et heureuse, mais ce sont ses paroles qui lui ont donné son exceptionnel retentissement. C'est que ces paroles, dans leur simplicité qui colle à celle de la mélodie, expriment une aspiration qui a dû traverser toutes les sociétés humaines depuis que ces sociétés existent : l'aspiration à un monde de paix, d'harmonie et d'amour, quand le monde réel n'a cessé d'être le contraire. Une chanson plus ancienne, celle du Québécois Raymond Levesque, évoque les années où « les hommes vivront d'amour ». Alors, dit la chanson, « ce sera la paix sur la Terre, les soldats seront troubadours ». Mais elle ajoute : « Mais nous nous serons morts, mon frère. Dans la grande chaîne de la vie, nous aurons eu la mauvaise partie ».

C'était en 1956. En 2023, nous avons toujours la mauvaise partie, et nous avons le sentiment que cette partie est désespérément mauvaise : la guerre frappe avec violence, portée par des ambitions sans retenue, la démocratie recule, la présence de l'homme sur sa planète est menacée par ses excès. Et, comme si nous l'avions sous les yeux, nous pouvons raconter une scène ancienne : revenus de la chasse, des hommes trouvent leur caverne pillée, les femmes et les enfants assassinés. Cette génération, déjà, avait la mauvaise partie.

Alors, pour le changer, pour passer le relais à des générations qui apercevront un coin de ciel bleu et prendront espoir, faut-il changer son système politique ou économique, viser plus encore dans la transformation du monde ? Il faut avoir le goût des utopies pour le penser. Mais, on le sait, les utopies ne sont de nulle part et elles n'ont pas les pieds sur terre. De là vient sans doute qu'elles ont, confrontées à l'exercice du pouvoir, mal tourné : les grands systèmes conçus comme un tout virent au totalitarisme dès qu'on cherche à les mettre en œuvre. Le communisme appliqué a conduit à Staline et donne encore des relents dans la Russie de Poutine, la religion d'amour qu'était le christianisme a été vite prise en otage par un pouvoir religieux de plus en plus séculier et les pouvoirs politiques, la révolution qui a produit une déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen et la belle devise « liberté, égalité, fraternité » a fait tomber des milliers de têtes, aujourd'hui des régimes se réclament de l'islam pour opprimer leurs peuples.

Il y a des idéologies plus insidieuses, celles qui habillent la réalité d'un masque pour justifier des dominations. Quoi de plus simple, de plus séduisant que le libéralisme, qui porte en lui le beau nom de liberté ? Le capitalisme a beaucoup aimé ce mot, qui a été le cadre et la condition de son expansion. La doctrine libérale a été l'habit de lumière du capitalisme jusque dans ses excès.

Nous n'avons pas d'autre choix, en réalité, que de continuer à imaginer, que de penser encore que nous avons notre bout de chemin à faire vers un monde meilleur. Nous avons nos valeurs, celles qui, du reste, nous rassemblent au sein de notre mouvement : la liberté, la paix, la fraternité. Mais c'est au jour le jour que nous les défendons, c'est dans le monde concret. Il ne faut pas désespérer du sort de ces valeurs et de leur avancée dans la chaîne des générations. La démocratie est aujourd'hui sur la défensive dans le monde ; nous avons connu la fin des aventures

coloniales, et nous les voyons renaître sous d'autres formes. L'accaparement des ressources par quelques-uns paraît retrouver des niveaux qu'on espérait avoir oubliés. La Terre s'impatiente de nos excès et menace de nous expulser. La déraison de quelques-uns qui conduit à la guerre est là, qu'on avait cru contenir. Cela veut dire qu'il nous faut donc, plus que jamais, vivre nos valeurs par nos paroles, donc nos écrits, et par nos actes de solidarité active. Être du côté des faibles et des opprimés d'aujourd'hui, du côté des victimes de la guerre, concrètement. En somme, prêcher par l'exemple cet amour dont rêve la chanson, et hâter son avènement...



## THE SCENT OF THE POSSIBLE

Medtem ko se je Stane Kavčič, predsednik Izvršnega sveta Slovenije, otepal obtožb o liberalizmu, nacionalizmu in še kakšnem izmu, saj so ga kar naprej klicali v Beograd, medtem ko se je bodel s trdorokci stare šole, smo mi vztrajali pri naši svobodomiselnosti. A sapa nam je pohajala. Otroci cvetja smo počasi odraščali, študij je zahteval svoje, ljubezni so nas začele zavezovati. Še vedno smo bili hudo proti programu študij-partija-štalca-kravca-otrok-avto-vikend, a počasi so se bliskali orisi trajnejših zvez. V novi komuni na podeželju se je rodil dojenček, zaželjen in ljubljjen, vzgajala ga je četica komunardov in z njim, kot z malim Budo, so se svitale alternative. Toda partija, zavedajoč se godrnjanja in zahtev državljanov po več svoboščinah in boljšem vsakdanjem življenju, je stopnjevala pritisk, vztrajno braneč svoje interese in privilegije. Ob nenehnem ponavljanju parol o zmagah delavskega razreda je imela zaledje v upognjenih hrbtih množic, ožila je prostor za drugačne, sploh za vse tiste, ki so zahtevali več svobode. Vsake toliko je malo popustila prijem in spustila paro, tako da je vse skupaj izgledalo bolj demokratično, in potem pipico spet hitro zaprla. Tudi komune so bile pod nadzorom.

Nismo vedno imeli energije ali volje za konfrontacijo s sivino vsakdana in z oblastjo. Medtem se je nezaposlenost zvišala do točke, ko je vsakdo že imel sorodnika ali znanca ali soseda, ki je bil gastarbajter v Avstriji ali Nemčiji. Nerodno je bilo poslušati gastarbajterje, ko so hvalili življenski slog in visok standard na Švedskem ali na Nizozemskem, in se niti približno niso želeli vrniti v rodne Trbovlje. Tam so morali stavkati, da bi sploh imeli dostojno plačo. Tudi mi smo skušali opozoriti na naraščajočo neenakost in korupcijo, proslavo OF 27. aprila 1971 smo popestrili s študentskim letakom, ki je razglašal: *Medtem ko si rdeči buržuji gradijo razkošne vile, si je moralo 16 tisoč fakultetno izobraženih Slovencev poiskati službo v inozemstvu.*

Hodili smo čez mejo po pralni prašek in boljše milo in riž, dobre damske vložke in zanesljive kondome. Plačevali smo z lirami, markami ali šilingi.

Zakaj moramo po osnovne potrebščine čez mejo?

Zakaj je obisk polnočnice politično dejanje in ne nekaj samoumevnega?

Zakaj nekatere izmed nas preventivno zaprejo pred vsakim tujim državnim obiskom?

Ujeti smo bili v pat poziciji.

A raje smo si predstavljali, da nismo v godlji polni sivine. Predstavljali smo si, da je svet brez meja in brez nasilja, da nismo razdeljeni na države in verovanja, da povsod vlada mir, da med nami ni razlik, da je svet eno. Da lahko sanjamo. Tako nam je zapel John, naš idol. Taisti John se je leta kasneje spomnil, da je nekako pozabil, da sta komad *Imagine* pravzaprav napisala skupaj z **Yoko Ono**.

Odlomek iz knjige Monike Žagar *Diši po dosegljivem*, MK, 2022.

## THE SCENT OF THE POSSIBLE

**John Lennon, Imagine!** Even as Stane Kavčič, President of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, was swatting away charges of liberalism, nationalism, and other isms, and was being summoned constantly to Belgrade, even as he was brawling with stubborn old-school communists, we still persisted in our freethinking ways. But our energy was waning. The flower children were growing up, our studies made demands on us, love had started to tie us down. We were still passionately against social expectations about how to become an adult: university degree – membership in the Communist Party – small apartment – child – car – weekend house. But nevertheless the outlines of more permanent relations were emerging. A baby, wanted and loved, was born at a new commune in the countryside. A squad of communards raised the child and, with this little Buddha, new alternatives appeared on the horizon. The Communist Party, hearing the complaints and demands of the citizens for greater freedoms and a better daily life, only increased the pressure, avidly defending their own interests and privileges. The Party had earned support on the bent backs of the masses with their constant repetition of slogans about the victory of the working class, but had narrowed the space for everyone else, especially for those who demanded more freedoms. Every so often, it released its grip and let out a little steam so that things looked more democratic, but it quickly closed the valve again. Even communes were monitored.

We didn't always have the energy or the will for confrontation with grey daily life or with the authorities. And all the while unemployment grew to the point that everyone had a relative or an acquaintance or a neighbor who was a guest worker in Austria or Germany or elsewhere. It was discouraging to hear guest workers praise the life style and high standards in Sweden or the Netherlands, saying that they had no desire whatsoever to return to their hometown of Trbovlje where they would have had to strike just to get decent pay. And so we also tried to draw attention to rising inequality and corruption. We spiced up the celebration of the Liberation Front on April, 27, 1971 with a student pamphlet that contained the charge: While the red bourgeoisie builds their luxury villas, sixteen thousand college-educated Slovenians had to look for jobs abroad.

We went to neighboring countries to buy detergent and better soap and rice, to buy decent sanitary pads and reliable condoms. We paid with Italian liras, German marks or Austrian shillings.

Why did we need to cross borders to meet our basic needs?

Why was attending Midnight Mass a political act and not something completely ordinary?

Why were some of us preventively jailed each time there was a visit from foreign state dignitaries?

We were stuck in a stalemate.

But still we preferred to believe that we were not trapped in the same total greyness. We imagined that the world was without borders and without violence, that we were not divided on the basis of nationality and religion, that peace was the order of the day, that there were no differences between us, that the world was one. That we could still dream. That was what our idol John sang to us in the song *Imagine*. Years later that same John admitted that he had somehow forgotten he had written the song together with **Yoko Ono**.

*Excerpt from: Monika Žagar, The Scent of the Possible*



## **ODNOS LITERATURE DO (KAKŠNE) RESNICE**

### **LITERATURE IS (WHICH) TRUTH AND JUSTICE?**

### **QUEL RAPPORT LA LITTÉRATURE ENTRETIENT-ELLE AVEC LA VÉRITÉ ?**

### **LA LITERATURA ES (¿CUÁL?) VERDAD Y JUSTICIA?**

Manifest Mednarodnega PEN-a “Democracy of Imagination” se konča z mislijo: “Literatura prestopa vse resnične in namišljene meje in je vedno v območju univerzalnega.” To je le začetna točka. Književnost pogosto dojemamo kot zrcalo družbe in posameznika. V današnjem svetu digitalnih tehnologij in družbenih omrežij nam vsak profil oziroma račun pove svojo zgodbo in predmet književnosti naenkrat postane izmikajoč, virtualen, deformiran, celo ponarejen. Kako mediji in njihova večna izredna stanja, ki podjetjem prinašajo vedno več denarja, vplivajo na pisanje in ustvarjanje? Se lahko književnost vrne k svojemu izvoru in bistvu? Je v hrušču digitalnih krikov mogoče ustvariti književnost, ki spodbuja pravičnost in mir v svetu in v vsakem posamezniku? Vsaka vojna se začne s Človekom. Pravičnost ni rima, tudi esej ali roman ne. Pravičnost je dejanje.

PEN international’s Democracy of Imagination Manifesto ends with a thought: “Literature crosses all real and imagined frontiers and is always in the realm of the universal.” Yet, this is the starting point. Literature is often considered a mirror of society and the individual. In today’s world of digital technology and social media when every profile and account is telling its own story, it seems that the object of literature is evasive, virtual, deformed, and even fake. How do media news and their perpetual states of emergency which make the companies earn more money affect writing and creating? How can literature return to the sources and essence of its being? Is it in the roar of digital cries possible to create literature that fosters justice and peace in the world and in every individual? Each war starts with the Man. Justice is not a verse, it is neither an essay nor a novel. Justice is action.

Le Manifeste pour la démocratie de l’imagination de PEN international se termine par la réflexion suivante : « La littérature traverse toutes les frontières réelles et imaginaires et elle est toujours dans le domaine de l’universel. » Pourtant, ce n’est que le point de départ. La littérature est souvent perçue comme le miroir de la société et des individus. Dans le monde actuel de la technologie digitale et des médias sociaux où chaque profil et chaque compte racontent leur propre histoire, il semble que l’objet de littérature soit évasif, virtuel, déformé et même faux. Comment les médias et leurs perpétuels états d’urgence qui font gagner plus d’argent aux entreprises affectent-ils l’écriture et la création ? Comment la littérature peut-elle retourner aux sources et à l’essence de son être ? Est-il possible dans les hurlements numériques de créer une littérature qui prône la justice et la paix dans le monde et en chaque individu ? Chaque guerre commence par l’Homme. La justice n’est pas un vers, ce n’est ni un essai ni un roman. La justice, c’est l’action.

El Manifiesto de la Democracia de la Imagenación de PEN International termina con una reflexión: “La literatura cruza todas las fronteras reales e imaginarias y siempre está en el ámbito de lo universal”. Sin embargo, éste es el punto de

W partida. La literatura suele considerarse un espejo de la sociedad y del individuo. En el mundo actual de la tecnología digital y las redes sociales, en el que cada perfil y cada cuenta narran su propia historia, parece que el objeto de la literatura es evasivo, virtual, deformado e incluso falso. ¿Cómo afectan a la escritura y a la creación las noticias de los medios de comunicación y sus continuos estados de emergencia que hacen ganar más dinero a las empresas? ¿Cómo puede la literatura volver a las fuentes y a la esencia de su ser? ¿Es posible, en el estruendo de los gritos digitales, crear una literatura que fomente la justicia y la paz en el mundo y en cada individuo? Cada guerra comienza con el Ser Humano. La justicia no es un verso, no es un ensayo ni una novela. La justicia es acción.

**JUST JUSTICE**

Be true to every inmost thought,  
And as thy thought, thy speech:  
What thou hast not by suffering bought,  
Presume thou not to teach.

—Henry Alford

On my fiftieth birthday I am wise to possibility that justice doesn't exist.  
It's time to take stock of this knowledge.  
"Nuremberg in literature," they say.  
What can poetry do about injustice?  
Drift into the realm of metaphor?  
Turn into a peculiar gathering of syllables?  
Is there any chance of justice being restored?  
Given that the ruins could be upcycled into another house,  
which will never make up for a lost home,  
is there any hope that peace of mind can be recovered with no peace at hand?  
What if the harm to my natural world is irreparable?  
My family loss, irretrievable?  
I am an accidental survivor.  
In this vers(ion) I must muddle through.  
What choices do I make when I can rely on neither formal rules nor universal laws?  
"You deserve better," they say.  
In the shadow of an eclipse, one must not lose sight but find a new way.  
Recalibrate.  
My great injustice repeats to me that I haven't understood before.  
Aporias of the war's aftermath:  
The Achilles of justice will never catch up with the tortoise of wrongdoing.  
And will never outsmart the war which aims to destroy us all.  
He will race in an aching loneliness instead of being with and being for others.  
Not a thing will ever be utterly fair.  
Not a thing.  
Just make sure that "damn all of them" will not dilute history.  
I'm bringing a blank slate into the room,  
setting it against the wall covered with scribbles.  
I'm shielding my eyes from the sun of blinding rightfulness.  
I'm drawing away the conundrum.  
I'm demining a younger fellow's mind.  
On my fiftieth birthday I'm helping the two of us shake off our cynical attitudes.  
The cynicism of accidental survivors.  
The general lack of hope.  
"That is my own strange way  
of making a difference," I say.

**VPRAŠANJE O LITERATURI IN RESNICI**

Naslov okrogle mize se glasi »Odnos literature do (kakšne) resnice«. Gre za vprašanje, ki predpostavlja tehten premislek, saj na to vprašanje avtorji literarnih del in vede o literaturi vedno znova iščejo odgovor, odkar je sploh mogoče govoriti o literaturi, kakršenkoli poskus odgovora pa vedno zastavlja vrsto nadaljnjih vprašanj. Recimo vprašanje, ali je resnica, kot je ta pojem uporabljen v tem naslovu nekaj objektivnega in dokončnega, torej nevprašljivega, vsem enako razvidnega in preverljivega ali pa vprašanje predpostavlja resnico kot subjektivno sodbo o čemerkoli, ki jo avtor kot svoj pogled na temo in vsebino, ki jo prezentira v svojem delu ponuja v preizkus in morebitno pritrditev bralcem. Lahko pa najbrž za marsikoga sofistično razglabljanje o samem pojmu resnica in o vprašanju, ali je o resnici kot nečem objektivnem in za vse veljavnem sploh mogoče govoriti, opustimo in pač pojem mislimo pragmatično kot praviloma v vsakdanjem življenju in vsakdanji komunikaciji, ko ga pač uporabljamo kot neproblematičnega in jasnega v skladu s še veljavno definicijo resnice in prepričanjem, da sta ali misel ali izjava o stvari lahko docela skladni s stvarjo (»veritas est adequatio intellectus et rei«), karkoli že stvar je ali seveda tudi ne, ker je oboje preverljivo in dokazljivo. V tem primeru pa se znajdemo pred vprašanjem, ali je literarno delo, vključno s sporočilom, (sploh lahko) verodostojna podoba ali razlaga stvarnosti, je res lahko, recimo, verodostojen posnetek oziroma popis nekega dogajanja, ki se je ali tudi ne dejansko odvijalo pred očmi avtorja ali je avtor vsaj naknadno in z vso resnostjo proučil in zbral o njem čisto vse dostopne podatke, oziroma ali je samo predstavitev nekega mnenja o nečem, kar se morda je zgodilo tako ali tudi ne ali je samo ilustracija in čim bolj mogoče ustrezna ponazoritev, interpretacija nekega dogajanja ali enkratnega dogodka, ki je lahko učinkovita, zanimiva, celo verjetna, pa vendar ne ustreza dejanskemu poteku interpretiranega dogajanja ali dogodka, ki ga literarno delo še tako prepričljivo obravnava, niti bistvu oziroma ideji, zaradi katere in pod vplivom katere se to, kar se v literarnem delu zgodi in je v njem popisano, zgodi in se zgodi tako oziroma je takšno, kot je opisano. Kaj pa v primerih, ko avtor obravnava izmišljen dogodek? Pa smo že, po eni strani pri teoriji literature kot domnevnega zrcala stvarnosti ali kar pri Platonu in vseh njegovih naslednikih vse do danes, ki predpostavljajo obstoj sveta čistih idej, absolutnega duha ali boga kot zadnje instance in merila, ki je odločilnega pomena za sleherno temo in vsebino literarnih del. Kot vemo je izhod iz te zagate ponudil že Platonov učenec Aristotel, ki je po eni strani vrnil vsej umetnosti in tako tudi in še posebej literaturi njeno integriteto, ko je pojmu mimesis (posnemanje) vrnil dostojanstvo in ocenil, da ne gre le za tehne ali tehniko (spretnost ali veščino), temveč še vedno (tudi) za poiesis, potemtakem za proces, ki omogoča, da dotlej neznano, skrito ali odsotno postane prisotno, razkrito in tako resnično (aletheia ali, recimo, razkrito, nepozabljeno, nespregledano). In s tega vidika, meni Aristotel, velja, da v umetnosti ne gre za opisovanje ali prikazovanje posameznih stvari ali dogodkov, ki dejansko obstajajo ali se slučajno res so zgodili, temveč za razkrivanje vzgibov oziroma zakonitosti, na osnovi katerih stvari obstajajo in se dogodki zgodijo in dogajajo, ki pa niso na prvi pogled vidne ali znane. Upošteva joč Aristotela to pomeni, da gre pri literaturi oziroma pri delu avtorjev literarnih in del drugih vrst

umetnosti po eni strani res za večino (mimesis v ožjem pomenu besede) ali, kot radi rečemo, obvladovanje obrti in izkušnje in po drugi strani za zmožnost vpogleda onkraj vidnega na prvi pogled, za sposobnost intuicije in osredotočenosti ali, z drugimi besedami, vživljanja v osebe, ki niso in nikoli niso bile in ne bodo avtorjev jaz in v situacije ter razmerja, ki jih nikoli ni in jih morda tudi nikoli ne bo doživel, pa vendar v najboljših primerih lahko o njih docela verodostojno priča. Četudi gre za popolne izmišljije. Skratka, zdi se, da v ospredju ni vprašanje resnice kot veritas in tudi ne resničnosti, ki naj bi jo avtor posnel, temveč vprašanje verodostojnosti in prepričljivosti umetnine, v našem primeru literarnega dela. Ne nazadnje pogosto tudi poudarjamo, da gre za fikcijo.

Pravda v okviru teme, ki jo, kot rečeno, vzpostavlja naslov te okrogle mize, traja že 2.300 let in še nekoliko dlje. O tem priča vratolomni razvoj literarnih ved, nešteto različnih poetik in teorij, literarnih in, širše, umetnostnih smeri, struj ali šol, ki se vedno znova navezujejo na filozofske in širše družbene in vsaj delno še na religijske koncepte in vedno je v ospredju vprašanje resnice in resničnosti literarnih oziroma umetniških del naj bo z vidika verskih resnic ali resnice, definirane na že omenjeni način kot veritas in zdi se, da gre ves čas za neke vrste nihanje med dvema konceptoma; med konceptom »znanstvene« resnice, razumljene dosledno v skladu z navedeno definicijo, in konceptom subjektivne resnice, ki jo, v našem primeru, sluti ali je celo prepričan vanjo, avtor, ki to svojo resnico skuša uveljaviti kot tudi splošno veljavno, skratka univerzalno, kar na nek način priča o neke vrste samozaverovanosti ali veri v koncept avtorja kot demiurga s tako rekoč nadnaravnimi darovi, ki verjame v avtorja maga, morda šamana in vizionarja, če že ne polboga. Zato številni avtorji zavračajo vse te teorije oziroma (zgolj) razumsko razglabljanje in iskanje možnosti legitimizacije literature in vse umetnosti z vidika objektivne resnice. Tako npr. tudi naš plodoviti in večkrat nagrajeni pesnik in esejist Iztok Osojnik v zadnjem intervjuju (revija Literatura, 2023, št. 381) v bistvu zavrača »literarne vedce, ki iz tega delajo znanost, ker bi radi na ta način prišli do privilegijev moči in raziskovalnih subvencij,« kot razlagalce pesniškega dela. Sam meni: »Pisanje je svoboda.« Skratka, pesnika ne sme nič omejevati, tudi merilo resnice zunaj njega ne.

Vse to je prejkone povezano, še vedno, predpostavljam, tudi s tem, da je po mnenju nekaterih antropologov in tudi strokovnjakov s področja umetnostnih ved prvotna umetnost, tedaj še kot mitologija vključno z ritualom kot načinom aktualizacije mita, kakor tudi religija in religiozno dožemanje sveta, človekov prvi in avtentični odziv na kompleksnost sveta, s katero se je soočil. In prav zato ena najprvobitnejših dejavnosti človeka kot človeka (homo sapiensa in po nekaterih mnenjih tudi neandertalca) po prehodu iz faze človečnjaka v fazo človeka kot mislečega bitja razuma. Gre za pristop, s katerim je človek že v zelo zgodnji fazi razvoja skušal iskati in najti odgovore na vprašanja o neznanem in pogosto strah vzbujajočem v okolju, vse, česar si še ni znal in ne zmožal pojasniti in ne razumeti, poskušal dojeti in po možnosti obvladati s pomočjo veščin in dejavnosti, ki so vključevale tudi prvine magije, animistične vere v posebne sposobnosti in lastnosti drugih bitij ter stvari in vere v moči in sile, ki so onstran vidnega in slišnega sveta itd. Z drugimi

besedami, človek se je na svet okrog sebe veliko prej odzval kot umetnik kakor kot npr. poljedelec.

In danes, ko je, vsaj tako se zdi, vse več skrivnosti že razkritih; ko se zdi, da bomo že kmalu videli vse do velikega poka oziroma rojstva veselja, ko vemo tako rekoč že vse o genih in naj bi jih že kmalu tudi v celoti obvladali, lahko popravljali in vnaprej preoblikovali, ko nekateri že špekulirajo tako rekoč o nesmrtnosti, in ko je samo še vprašanje let do usposobitve umetne inteligence s številnimi lastnostmi, doslej rezerviranimi samo za človeka; ko se torej zdi, da je skrivnosti vse manj in jih kmalu ne bo več in ko naj bi, kot je napovedal že znani publicist Harari, človek prenehal biti homo sapiens in postal homo deus? Čeprav ena skrivnost, temna materija in temna energija (gotovo ne slučajno »temna«) še vztraja ...

Zdi se da v bistvu vsa umetnost in ne le literatura že išče izhod iz te situacije in pravkar omenjene dileme in se pravzaprav, ne prvič v zgodovini, odpoveduje vprašanju, ki so jo in nas mučila, kot rečeno, skoraj 2.400 let in se odpoveduje tudi zavezanosti estetskosti in težnji po estetskem učinku ter se opredeljuje za angažma oziroma aktivizem več različnih vrst. To pomeni, da posamezne smeri tudi znotraj literature ne verjamejo več v možnost ene za vse veljavne resnice in zavračajo vero v zavezanost kakršnikoli univerzalni resnici in postavljajo na prvo mesto vsaka svojo resnico, v bistvu resnico te ali one ideologije, ki ji skušajo in želijo služiti. Zato v teh post post modernih ali kdo še ve kakšnih časih hkrati koeksistira vrsta različnih smeri in struj tudi znotraj literature in celotne umetnosti, ki svojega smisla, kot rečeno, ne iščejo ali ne vidijo več v razkrivanju in uveljavljanju neke za vse veljavne resnice, temveč v uveljavljanju določene parcialne vizije oziroma skupinske ideologije, ki pa jo seveda skušajo uveljaviti kot trenutno najpomembnejšo in ključno družbeno spremembo, četudi kot rečeno gre največkrat za ideologijo ene od interesnih skupin znotraj družbe. Pri čemer pa se, kot se zdi prvič, nikakor ne oporeka nobeni drugi od teh struj ali upravičenosti njenih pričakovanj, razen seveda tisti ali tistim strujam, ki v skladu s tradicionalnim vzorcem vedenja skušajo svojo ideologijo uveljaviti kot za vse veljavno oziroma kot tisto, ki se ji morajo vse ostale ideologije ali resnice podrediti in prilagoditi ali se umakniti; kot takega gotovo lahko v zadnjem času zaznamo, tudi v Evropi in tudi v Sloveniji, vse bolj vsiljivi konservativni suverenizem oziroma nacionalizem.



## ABOUT LITERATURE AND TRUTH

The title of this round table is: Relationship between literature and (about any sort of) truth. The question presupposes deeper analyses of many answers given by literary theory and writers alike. All through the history of literature every attempt to find an answer opens a new chain of new questions. For instance, let's just take a question: What is truth? Are we considering that the word we use in this case is something objective and final, therefore unquestionably true, clear to all? Perhaps we are talking of a subjective notion about something? Perhaps the author is only offering his or her own view on a theme or suggesting a certain content to be examined? Is he or she only looking for an affirmation of certain theses?

We might decide to by-pass sophisticated deliberation and we might choose to think that it is not even possible to speak of the truth as if it is something objective and commonly valid. We can choose to be pragmatic and to think of the truth as a notion similarly as we think of everything else in our communication in everyday life. We can choose to use the word truth as something unproblematic and clear, believing that some thought or a certain statement can be totally in accordance with the object it describes (»veritas est adequatio intellectus et rei«). We can choose to consider whichever object - one that either exists or perhaps not at all. All that matters is the availability to examination or verification.

In this case we are faced by the following question: Can a work of literature (its content included) be a credible image or straight explanation of reality? Can a work of literature, by any means, credibly reflect or describe a certain happening, which the writer saw by his or her own eyes or perhaps not even that. Perhaps the author seriously and fully devoted him or herself to research the actual event and to gather absolutely all possible data? On the other hand the author might have chosen to present an opinion about something by somebody else, about something which did or perhaps didn't actually occur. Is the writing perhaps only an illustration, which is more or less accurate, an interpretation of some unique event? Is such an approach effective, interesting, credible? Does it do justice to an event or an incident which has been interpreted - no matter how convincingly? Does it do justice to the essence of the idea, from which the work of literature itself originates? What is it influenced by? What happens when the author engages with an illusionary subject?

We reached a point which has been touched by the theory of literature or by Plato himself and by all his followers up to the current times. From a certain angle we can suppose that there exists a world of clear ideas, of absolute essence and of God as the highest instance. Is it possible that there exists a clear criterion according to which every single theme and context of any work of literature can be defined? It is well known that Aristotle, a disciple of Plato, offered an answer. He was able to define the integrity of any work of art, particularly the integrity of literature. He re-established dignity to "mimesis" (mimetic method of writing). He pointed out that "techno" (craft, know-how) is not enough. According to him making art (poetry included) is a process which enables (althea) - something yet unknown, hidden or absent to become apparent and therefore real. From this point of view, according to Aristotle, art is not about description or illustration of things or events, which exist

or have happened, but it is about illuminating the roots or legitimacy of the existence of things or events, which are not necessarily apparent at first sight. Keeping Aristotle in mind we can say that authors of literary or any other genre of arts must have some know-how. They must be masters of their trade, so to speak, and they have to rely on their experience. At the same time, they must be able to detect what is beyond detectable at first sight. They must use their intuition and they have to be focused, they have to be able to identify themselves with things or persons they have never known before (or been so themselves) and they have to be able to imagine events they will never experience, as long as they are capable of presenting them in a credible way - even when their work of art is a fruit of total imagination.

Therefore, it looks like the question of truth is not in focus. The truth the author wants to imitate is not in focus either. The question in focus is credibility and persuasion of the work of art, of a piece of writing in our case. Last and not least we tend to speak of fiction when we have literature on our mind.

This subject has been discussed for at least 2300 years. An amazing number of different literary sciences and theories and literary schools have flourished since. All are supported by philosophic and socio-political, often by religious concepts. The question of truth and truthfulness of literary works of art have always been on the agenda regardless of countless points of view. We can speak, generally, about two concepts: a concept of "scientific" and a concept "subjective" truth. In the second case the author can sense the truth or believes in it and he or she wishes to put it across as something generally accepted, therefore as universal. In a way we can speak of the author's self-assurance. We can regard the author as some sort of a "demiurge," a possessor of supernatural gifts. The author is regarded as some sort of a magician, a shaman, a visionary, even a sort of demi-god. This is why many authors reject all these theories or (semi) rational explanations and ways of manifestation of legitimacy of literature (and other forms of art). Iztok Osojnik, for instance, a poet and essayist (Literatura, 2023, no. 381) rejects interpreters of poetry. He sees them as literary experts, who know it all, who are making a science out of it, because they would like to achieve privileges of power (status) and financial grants for research. He states that "writing equals freedom". A poet should work under no restriction. Can we not conclude that there should be no restriction to the truth when poetry is being discussed?

We can presume that all this is linked to the teachings of anthropologists and specialists on literary science. Primarily art is based on authentic human response to the complexity of the world. We speak of art as mythologies, including rituals as actualisation of myths as well as of religion and religious understanding of the world at large. Making art is one of the basic and oldest activity people got involved in during the process of evolution (Homo sapiens, in some respect even Neanderthals). Homo sapiens started to look for answers to questions about the unknown, often about something that caused fear, about anything which was unexplainable at the time. Homo sapiens wanted the world to be understood,



**LITERATURE IS (WHICH) TRUTH AND JUSTICE?**

comprehended. He wished that fears would be overcome by the help of knowledge, perhaps by something based on magic, on animistic beliefs in special powers and ability, on beliefs in powers and forces beyond sensual perception. In other words, we can say that human beings reflected upon the surrounding world (for instance becoming a farmer) much earlier than making art.

Today we might feel that more and more of the previously unknown has become clarified and we might believe that we know everything about the past going as far back as the Big bang or the birth of the universe. We presume that we know all about genetics, that we can even tackle immortality. There might be only one speculation left: How to make use of artificial intelligence, which will be able to replace humans in countless ways. We might think that there are less and less secrets left and that there will soon be none undiscovered. There might soon be time when “men will cease to be Homo sapiens and will turn into Homo deus”, as was suggested by Yuval Noah Harari. Although dark matter and dark energy still persist (not dark by chance).

It seems that all art, not just literature, looks for the way out of this situation and out of the dilemma. Not for the first time in history artists are renouncing questions which have occupied us for almost 2400 years. Artists are renouncing their obligation to aesthetic effect. Artists are siding with all sorts of activism and engagement. This means that some writers don't believe in one all-encompassing truth any more. They are renouncing belief in any universal truth. They stand by their individual truth, each by their own. It can be said that they believe in truth of this or that ideology, which they try to serve. This is why nowadays, in the so-called post-modern times, there coexist simultaneously a multitude of different movements in the sphere of literature as well as in all manifestations of art. In the full sense artists are not looking for universal truth. Their intent is not to uncover the unknown. They are trying to put forward the most popular or the most widely currently accepted ideology, proclaiming it to be the most important and essential social changing force. Most often than not ideology of one specific social group steps forward. It is also obvious that perhaps for the first time nobody is contradicting anybody, as long as nobody is out of tune with traditional patterns of behaviour and as long as nobody tries to proclaim one's own ideology as the only valid one. Accidentally this often happens in Europe nowadays, in Slovenia, too. Conservatism and nationalism are becoming more and more obtrusive.

*Translated by Ifigenija Simonović*

The notion that literature has some form of intrinsic moral value for its capacity to speak truth to power is obviously popular among writers. It certainly is at the core of the positive self-image of PEN. There even is some truth to it: Yes, there are and always have been some saintlike heroes among us holders of pens and pencils who suffer persecution for the truth they have spoken and the justice they have demanded. However, the full truth about the moral value of what we Masters of words do in the world is much more complex. One does not have to remember Plato who famously warned against literature precisely because of its capacity to lie and distort. May it suffice to correct our self-image to remind ourselves that from Stalin and Mao to Saddam and Karadzic the number of poets among dictators and war-criminals is significantly higher than in the ordinary population. Fiction writing (or painting like Hitler, for that matter) is at best orthogonal to the pursuit of truth and justice, and more likely indicative of an individual's likelihood of having the self-righteous narcissistic personality artists share with dictators and habitual criminals. If so, then the one moral net-worth literature could provide to society is to give such people a harmless playground to act out their antisocial tendencies without having to rape, murder or start a war. Otherwise, any idea of literature contributing to the pursuit of truth and justice seems unfounded today. Before the internet, spreading one's tales beyond family and friends required to get past gatekeepers, be it church or state censorship in authoritarian societies, or at least editors of newspapers and publishing houses in liberal ones. Maybe back then, the net-effect of what was published (and especially what was published by smuggling it past those gatekeepers!) had a net-positive effect on the amount of truth and justice a society enjoyed. The positive – and often quite bloated – self-image of famous 20th century writers was based on this role. In the world of today though, where every insight, including academic research, is reduced to being just one narrative among others, and where just about everyone is an author of their own version of the world, one message can at best be hoped to balance and overwrite another one. The world of today is a trillion-layered palimpsest, and what writing usually brings about is either plain nothing, or an unjust shitstorm. Somehow the truth will prevail, though: But not because someone told it, but because it becomes observable in the mostly sorry results of mostly uninformed and unreflect action. As Goethe observed: Am Anfang war die Tat. It is not words that move the world, but deed.

**LE CAP DE LA VÉRITÉ**

La littérature entretient un rapport gourmand avec la vérité. Elle la hume, la pèse, la malaxe, la transforme comme le fait le boulanger avec sa pâte. Elle a pour tradition, pour vocation, d'inventer, à partir du réel, mais en le travestissant. Elle offre ainsi au monde des éléments d'explication profonde et d'évasion. Elle a rempli cet office nécessaire depuis des millénaires, avant même qu'elle fût écrite.

Mais elle a maintenant, peut-on dire, l'herbe coupée sous ses pieds. Elle a, et elle en est désarçonnée, des concurrents nouveaux et déloyaux. La concurrence, d'autres arts l'ont connue : la peinture a dû digérer la photographie. Quelle est cette concurrence dangereuse ? Les réseaux sociaux, bien sûr, où les affabulations prospèrent. Pas encore, dans son état actuel, l'intelligence artificielle, bien plate et sans imagination ; mais que nous réserve l'avenir, quand on voit que même ses inventeurs s'inquiètent de ce qu'elle peut devenir ?

Mais la littérature a trouvé, dans son rapport ambigu avec la vérité, un concurrent déloyal et implacable, porté par des enjeux et des moyens contre lesquels elle a du mal à lutter : la parole politique, à commencer par celle des États, crée des réalités alternatives qui vont plus loin qu'elle, en s'affranchissant de tout lien avec la vérité, plus loin qu'elle qui cherche toujours à s'appuyer sur une réalité. « Peut-être que ce qui distingue le véritable écrivain, même modeste, a écrit un jour Claudio Magris, c'est la conscience de ne pas être auteur ou créateur, mais réceptacle fortuit ou verbalisateur attentif des épiphanies qui lui sont offertes ». Le nouvel État s'est affranchi de toute relation avec la plus minuscule réalité, il invente, il ment, à partir de son seul intérêt et pour défendre ce seul intérêt. Il crée à partir de rien le monde dont il attend qu'il assoie son emprise sur la société.

Des États avaient, déjà, travesti la réalité, tordant les faits pour les soumettre à leur propagande, comme les entreprises en quête de marchés leur en avaient montré la voie.. Les littérateurs, alors, avaient intégré cette réalité dans leurs histoires ; certains avaient mis leurs ressources d'imagination au service des pouvoirs économiques ou politiques. C'est qu'il y avait, toujours, un fond de vérité qu'il n'était pas très difficile de débusquer, et l'imagination y était discrète : juste quelques pinces pour enjoliver des faits existants. Mais on est entré dans un monde nouveau quand les États ont franchi l'étape suivante : la rupture de tout lien entre la vérité et le discours. Nous en avons sous les yeux l'application la plus sinistre avec ce qui nous vient de Moscou.

Que peuvent faire l'écrivain, l'artiste ? On les a vus se confronter de plus en plus à la réalité directe, en abandonnant le roman pour le récit documentaire. C'est un chemin parmi d'autres. Mais, quelle que soit la route prise, c'est au mensonge, à la vérité alternative que doit s'attaquer l'écrivain aujourd'hui s'il veut rester lui-même et remplir la fonction pour laquelle la suite des temps l'a jugé nécessaire, refléter le monde, tenter de l'expliquer. La littérature, avec ses mots qui ne trichent pas, avec son analyse irremplaçable de toutes les épaisseurs du vivant, est la vigie et le refuge de la vérité.

**HISTORY OF FACTS, HISTORY OF TRUTH, HISTORY OF LIES**

Although it seems that the expressions like fake news, alternative facts, and propaganda started with the mass media not earlier than a century ago, and some of them only very recently, they have accompanied human societies for millennia. As a writer focused on historical fiction, I have come across many versions of the same historical fact everybody holds for true still today.

Who is not aware of the famous saying by philosopher Blaise Pascal? "The nose of Cleopatra: if it had been shorter, the whole face of the earth would have changed." (Pensée 162) Yet do we know who was Cleopatra? Thinking of the great Egyptian queen reigning in the 1st century B. C., our memory is always related to her two most famous Roman lovers: Julius Cesar and Marc Anthony. Who remembers her amazing intelligence, beauty, and political competence that made her country one of the most successful states neighbouring the great Roman Empire and thus a desirable object of the Roman invasion? She spoke several foreign languages fluently, was an apt diplomat, and tried everything to preserve the independence of her country Egypt. The historians who were writing about her used different terms: sexual predator who with her oriental vice seduced two brave Roman husbands and rulers; a woman who bore them children out of wedlock: one to Cesar, three to Anthony, and a worshiper of animalism. Roman historians reported the facts as they comprehended them and as Roman politics and the public wanted them. In this, they were faithful sons of the society in which women were subjected to men in all respects and had no political rights. Should I start writing a novel about Cleopatra, I would have to rely on those facts. I faced a similar dilemma a few times when trying to enter the body and soul of Diocletian, Valvasor, and Tito. Showing their intimate thoughts and hopes is very different from the historical notation of their acts.

Much of the history we know today was written by winners and practically all of it was written by men, so you will have to dig really deep to find women of honour in it. This one-eyed Cyclops who enfolds the story of Mankind under our eyes only from the male perspective - can or will we believe him?

Historical fiction must rely on facts.

We, novelists, would like to think that truth of art is truer than the truth of facts.

All the same, facts have become an important part of our lives. Not those facts we read in history books or the press, but the facts we use indirectly in our daily life. The culprit for this is René Descartes who in the 17th century invented the four-step method of doubt, divide, deduct, and test, which propelled scientific research and development to bring us to the modern industrial and digital society. Science is based on hard facts that cannot be faked or alternated if we want the car to run and the mobile phone to ring. There's no room for interpretation or alternative truths, every law of physics must be obeyed. Or in the words of the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel when they asked her why she chose to study physics in East Germany under the communists: "One did not need to lie so much."

Are we willing to welcome science as the only truth?

Are we happy to worship true facts over spiritual impressions and experiences?

Even Descartes admits that at the last step of the method, you need intuition, a capacity that is not measurable in any unit. With intuition, you can invent new discoveries and theories which explain the essence of our mind and the world around us.

In the 17th century, this intuition was divine intervention. When it inspired something grand it was thought to have come from God.

Today, the gods of science are facts.

Big data can process so many facts in a glimpse of the moment that humans feel humble in face of such knowledge. ChatGPT can be a real friend responding to a click. Still, AI has to learn a lot before we entirely trust it forever.

In the 20th century, the theory of relativity shook the limitless trust in science. Philosophers, researchers, and writers concentrated on personal human experience and sought the truth in new exploration of mind and brain, in the words of Carl Jung: “Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.” This notion was sublimely expressed in Proust’s phrase of Vinteuil, music that transports a human being beyond his time and place. In the face of all the schisms and isms that annihilated millions of innocent people during WWI and WWII, it is I, the individual, who becomes the centre of attention. Individualism has changed not only the comprehension of truth but also language and literature. We witness styles that relativize time, place, characters, and narrators. More and more we are writing stories that could have happened irrelevant to the period in which they are set. Art releases the shackles of time and space. It liberates the creativity of facts.

For various reasons during the last millennia, historical fiction is gaining more and more popularity. During the leaden times of iron curtains and wars, it was censorship that pushed writers into the past in order to describe the present and offer a glimpse of the future. This is still the case for many countries where writers seek for the message between the lines to evade being persecuted, jailed, or killed.

In Slovenia, we have superb historical novels about the pile dwellers on the Ljubljana Moor and heroic tales of the Slavic tribes in the times of the Byzantine Empire. Our most prolific female author of historical fiction, Mimi Malenšek, has written one thousand-page-long historical biographies of all important Slovenian men and women of the past. Heroes and heroines could speak out about the freedom in a way that would not be tolerated from the mouth of the citizens under the fist of communism. Publishing industry (followed by film and TV productions) at large likes dealing with history, it is perceived as educational and good entertainment. Thus gothic novels and TV series can bring the events of Emperor Nero’s reign or the Elizabethan court into bedrooms and living rooms. Historical fiction up to very recently did not experiment with various forms of novels and rarely tolerated narration in the first person singular. It reflected the historical circumstances although characters often thought and acted as modern men and women would in spite of the fact that they might be using outdated and long-forgotten words.

One thing is very convenient for authors of historical fiction – establishing justice. After the events had undergone international judgment (like the Nürnberg process or ICTY) it was easy to choose the right side.

In Slovenia, the cleft between the communist partisans and other combatants who opposed communism and often collaborated with the occupying forces remained visible to the present day. More than ever, after almost eight decades since WWII, Slovenians are a divided nation. New proofs of the crimes during the communist reign, and the betrayal of the collaborators during occupation offer room for interpretation which does not undergo the method of Descartes’ four steps and is far from the hard science, however, it breaks definitely more minds than phones or cars could ever do. Rationalism, this safe haven of liberal thinking within the limitations of a democratic society, is gone. It is lost in the cries of haters, inflaming people with their thirst for attention no matter at which cost. The wars that were yesterday fought online, become real today. Lives are lost, and blood is shed with no hope to wash away falsehood and make truth out of a lie.

In this mess of fake news, alternative truths and hate speech, propaganda gains grounds and promotes the reasons why countries were attacked, why hospitals were bombed and cultural monuments were destroyed. Political lies fill people’s minds with poison and quite often their bodies with bullets. In the heat of the battle, there’s no time for reflection on who and why. All knowledge and experience from the past are forgotten. The only concern at the frontline is to survive.

Today the propaganda works on many levels and travels to individuals via their accounts on social media. When an individual succumbs to half-truths and manipulative lies, he becomes the medium himself by sharing and commenting. During the Covid 19 pandemic, trolls that were later proven to have originated in companies selling health supplements averted people from vaccination. Let’s not think how many people believed these false messages, didn’t get the vaccine, fell ill, and maybe even died as a direct consequence of believing in propaganda. Lately, Russian propaganda permeated Slovenia society to the point that in the name of peace, very distinct public figures unwillingly spread Russian ambitions to freeze the front in Ukraine no matter where and at whose expense. Of course, the Russian regime long ago locked up all critical journalists and thinkers in order to manipulate the people and make them fight in the trenches for the power of the few. The only way to fight against the propaganda and oppose the lies it spreads is a stable democracy and a free press.

Throughout history, truth is a furtive butterfly, easily stifled by a rain of lies or blown away by explosions of emotions.

Yet, poets and writers believe in truth. Many poets have written verses about it, and have been exploring the nuances of human comprehension to the credo of all art. Few have expressed it so concisely as John Keats in his Ode to the Grecian Urn: “Truth is beauty, beauty truth – that is all // ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

This poetic truth inflates my heart and leads my PEN while I’m trying to tell the world a story.



## THE MYTH OF GERMAN ALMOST BECOMING THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE UNITED STATES

It was in England that I first heard the story that at one time in the early Federalist period in the United States German had almost become the official language of the nation. Although I grew up in the United States, I had never heard this before. It seemed so far-fetched and unlikely! By 1800 the thirteen original English colonies and then the new States were well established as English-speaking polities with a few enclaves of speakers of other languages, mainly German and Dutch and perhaps Swedish, as far as I knew. The early settlers in that part of North America were overwhelmingly from the British Isles. This story seemed improbable, but how could I be sure?

I thought it must be some left-over Nazi propaganda from the 1930s. I could imagine that the word was put around that the United States was largely German—there was the proof of that near-miss with the German language—and therefore had everything in common with modern Germany and should support it politically. However, I was wrong.

The story is more interesting and much more complicated than that, and has nothing to do with Germany in the 1930s. According to one version, the close vote happened in 1776, and in another version it was 1795. The first date seems very unlikely, as the English colonies were getting into a war with the mother country and would have had little time for quibbles about language.

As for the second date, there is an explanation for what happened. A German community in Virginia petitioned Congress to print the Federal laws in German, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the time was a certain Frederick Muhlenberg, A German-American who might have been expected to support the petition, but he voted against it on the grounds that assimilation would be easier if the German community learned English. During the debate there was a vote to adjourn the sitting, but it failed by a single vote. These two events were combined and a myth was born. Now it became the matter of the German language and the narrow vote that joined to create a whole new narrative. It was never about an “official language” anyway, but just the translation of laws into another language.

By the mid-19th century German-Americans, wanting to enhance the reputation and importance of Americans of German descent, took the myth to the next stage. According to the revived story, German had been such a widespread language in the original colonies and the nascent United States that it had come within a whisker of being named the national language. (Never mind that these were all English colonies with English customs, education, and laws.)

To be fair, German was spoken in certain areas, and a dialect of German, Pennsylvania Dutch (“Pennsilfaanisch-Deitsch”), is still spoken by the Amish communities in Pennsylvania and a few other states. An early German printing press was in Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania in the 1730s. Many Hessian mercenaries stayed behind after the Revolutionary War, and the 19th century saw a great influx of German immigrants. There were German-language newspapers and schools and, apparently, a German version of “The Star-Spangled Banner”. Americans owe

their Christmas trees, hamburgers, and beer to German immigrants. There was just enough truth behind the myth to make it faintly plausible.

Myths like this are difficult to debunk completely. Once some notion has been articulated, it exists in the ether and can be revived in a new generation. If a few centuries separate us from the alleged event and people have a rather sketchy knowledge of history, the myth bursts out again like a tulip in April.

How can we guard against falling into the trap of believing something just because it is a “well-known fact” that no one seems to question? An equally serious trap is innocently passing on erroneous information. The only answer I can think of is to notice if something seems unlikely and then look a bit further. Maybe it really is true, but maybe it isn't.



## TEŽKE STRASTNE VEKE

Sedla sem. Dva moška, ženska, šest praznih stolov.  
Pri vseh drugih mizah je bilo živahno. Vino je teklo  
Pesnik s kitaro je opeval žalost. Strastno. Ploskali smo.  
Šele ko so odnesli krožnike, smo se pozdravili.

Nekaj na enem od moških me je pritegnilo.  
Iz Azije. Ne bi mogla reči, od kje. Po koži sem sklepala.  
In krasno zarezane temne oči. Ni jedel. Naročil je pivo.  
Zdelo se mi je, da je dišal. Prizanesljivo je molčal.

Obračal je na smeh. Turistična vprašanja, je rekel.  
Zardela sem. Dušila sem strast, ki me je silila sesti bliže.  
Ko so že stregli suhe fige s sladoledom, je povedal, nestrpno,  
da je bil šest let v samici. Večino časa v kletki sredi samice.

Če so verige ropotale, so ga premlatili - pazniki,  
ker niso mogli v miru igrati starodavne igre.  
Če je zastokal, so ga prebricali - sojetniki,  
ker niso mogli spati, če je stokal.

Zaporniki so bili hujši od ječarjev. Krulili so, tolkli po mreži,  
ko je zatisnil oči, kadar ni zmogel biti buden.  
Spravili so se nanj, strastno. Ker je sramotil domovino.  
Poskakovali so po njegovih prstih, da ne bo več pisal.

Hrana brez žlice. Vedno tekoča. Nikoli topla.  
Voda v nikoli umitem koritu. On nikoli umit.  
Nikoli obrit. Nikoli ostrižen. Nikoli preoblečen.  
Nikoli zares sam, niti v samici, je rekel.

Pil je kaplje z las, kadar so ga polili, da bi se osvestil.  
Enkrat je pogoltnil posebej strastno. Še požirek, dva.  
A bilo je razkužilo. Iz njega se je izlila gnojnica, zelena  
od plesni sestradanega želodca. To ni moje, si je mislil, je rekel.

Enkrat na teden so mu dovolili izprazniti kiblo.  
Takrat so mu trije pazniki, pasje besni in polni gnusa, sneli verige.  
Trije so jih snemali, trije, ko on ne bi mogel dvigniti vek, kaj šele pesti.  
Lahko bi poletel, se mu je zdelo, je rekel.

Zleknil se je. Stegnil je noge pod mizo. Srečal je moje.  
Začutila sem mir, čeprav mu je koleno drgetalo.  
Ploskala sem pesniku s kitaro, medtem ko sem se začela zaljubljati  
v moškega, ki ga ne bom nikoli več videla.

## HEAVY LUSTFUL EYELIDS

I sat down. Two men, a woman, six empty chairs.  
Around the other tables it was lively. Wine was flowing.  
A poet with his guitar singing, passionate about sadness. Applause.  
Only after plates were taken away, did we greet each other.

Something attracted me to one of the men.  
Asian. I couldn't say where from. The colour of his skin.  
And his dark eyes beautifully inscribed. He was not eating. He ordered beer.  
It seemed to me that he smelled sweet. He was silent. Springly.

He kept making jokes. Tourist questions, he said.  
I blushed. He scented my passion, which made me want to sit closer.  
As dry figs with ice-cream were served, impatiently he told me  
that he had been in solitary confinement for six years. In a cage most of the time.

If his chains rattled, he was bitten by the guards  
because they couldn't play their ancient game in peace.  
If he moaned his fellow prisoners kicked him  
because they couldn't sleep when he cried out.

Prisoners were worse than jailers. They shouted, bit the iron net,  
whenever he closed his eyes and couldn't stay awake.  
They fell upon him, passionately. Because he discredited his homeland.  
They jumped on his fingers so that he would not be able to write again.

Food without a spoon. Always liquid. Never warm.  
Water never in a clean trough. He never washed.  
Never shaved. His hair never cut. His clothes never changed.  
Never really alone, not even in a solitary confinement, he said.

He was drinking drops dropping from his hair, when he was soaked to wake him up.  
Once he swallowed with a special passion. One more gulp, two.  
But it was disinfectant. Liquid shit poured out of him. Green,  
from the mould of his insides. This is not mine, he thought to himself, he said.

Once a week they allowed him to empty the bucket.  
Three wardens, madly angry, took off his chains,  
Three of them, when he could not lift his eyelid, still less his hand.  
It seemed to him he could fly, he said.

He stretched his legs behind the table. His legs met mine.  
I sensed peace although his knee trembled.  
I was applauding the singer with his guitar, while I was beginning to fall  
in love with a man I would never see again.

**THE ALEXANDRIANS**

We were sent,  
we were left alone  
of our own will and against it,  
some of us trembled  
with the hope of happiness,  
which for many turned into a disaster. Many times sacrificed  
for home and family  
we left a thin trail  
in a hot country,  
in children who were not our own  
but they loved us,  
because of the coastal land,  
because of our homes,  
that the bloodline could remain on it.  
With torn hearts,  
with our longing locked away,  
we hung  
On the crucifix between the new and old land.

\*

We were many. Our names were Marija, Ivanka, Milena, Zofija, Marta, Pepca, Milka, Angela ... . We came from poor, torn villages and entered a world that removed the veils from the life of high society and offered opportunities and set traps.

\*

**MARIJA (MARY)**

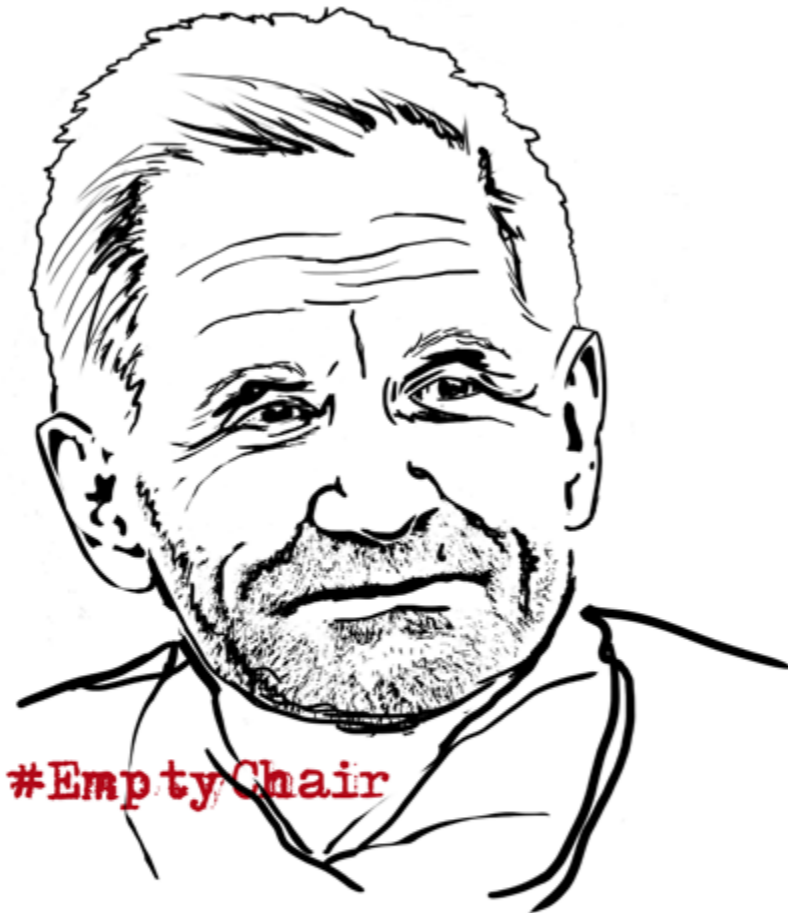
Now I am on the ship, the steamer is huge; it looks like a big house. I read »Heluan« in the port before we boarded. The name seems strangely foreign to me, as will everything waiting for me on this path. I am staring into the boundlessness of the sea and observing what is happening on the deck. In the last days, I have experienced more than I have ever experienced in my whole young life. Fortunately, I am not travelling alone, Matilda is a returnee; she left a three-month-old son and a three-year-old daughter at home. She is carefully attending to her breasts; she already knows how to take care of herself on the journey so that she does not lose her breast milk. She is trying to be a woman, standing firmly and bravely facing the situation before her. She keeps repeating, "What can we do? It is as it is." And it's good that it is the way it is! I feel that under this brave appearance, she hides grief and pain and she is driving away the thoughts of the baby she left behind in her mother-in-law's care. But at night, when we lie on the deck chairs and the hustle and bustle of the ship subsides, I hear muted cries. The quiet of the night reveals her pain through the cracked mask of keeping up appearances.

"Mathilda," I call her gently. I turn to her and look for her hand, which hangs like a dead fish over the edge of the chair. I gently squeeze it. No words are needed, I cannot do more.

"I know, I mustn't be sad: it affects the milk badly. My mistress wants me to be happy and smiling, as her baby's nurse should be. Happy! It's not the first time; it was worse the first time," she answers me. She slowly calms down, and then quietly asks me, "Tell me, what kind of damned country this is that our families cannot survive? And that we must sell our bodies and breast milk, tear our bonds with our own child, who we carried for nine months, who grew inside us, who we gave birth to in pain and who we love without limit? I must let go of him, and leave him in the care of others while those who have money buy the right to his breasts. Tell me Marija, where's the justice in that? And why should this happen to us, young mothers from the Vipava Valley?"

Darinka Kozinc: an excerpt from *Aleksandrinke*, original title: *Les Goriciennes* 2020

**EMPTY CHAIRS**  
**PRAZNI STOLI**  
**CHAISE VIDE**  
**SILLA VACÍA**



**ALES BIALIATSKI :**  
BELARUS

Writer, human rights defender, Nobel Peace Prize winner and PEN Belarus member **Ales Bialiatski** is the founder of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, a leading human rights organisation whose work and members have been repeatedly targeted by the Belarusian authorities. In July 2021, Bialiatski was detained alongside several Viasna colleagues following raids by Belarusian law enforcement officers on more than a dozen civil society and human rights organisations. He was transferred to pre-trial detention on trumped-up charges of tax evasion, and subsequently charged with smuggling and organising and financing actions that grossly violate public order. His trial opened in Minsk in January 2023. Bialiatski repeatedly asked that the prosecutor and the court conduct the trial in the Belarusian language, to no avail. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison on 3 March 2023. Six members of Viasna are currently behind bars. PEN International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Bialiatski and Viasna colleagues, and for the verdicts to be overturned on appeal.



**FESSEHAYE 'JOSHUA'**  
**YOHANNES : ERITREA**

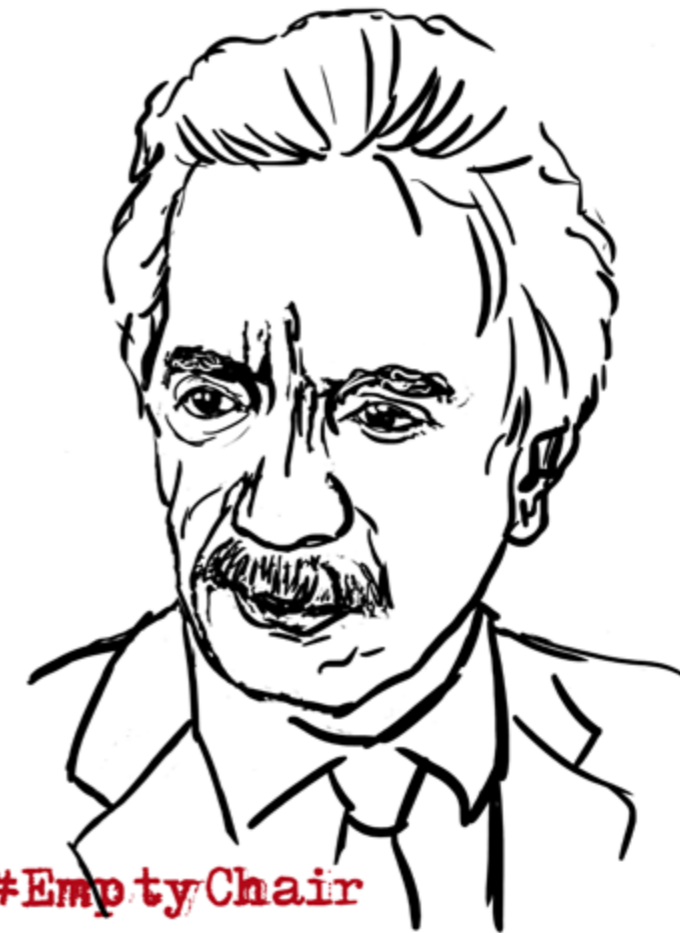
**Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes** is an Eritrean poet, playwright, short story writer, lyricist, journalist, and co-owner of the independent Setit newspaper. He has been held in incommunicado detention without trial for 22 years. Fessehaye was arrested at his home on the morning of 23 September 2001. He is among 16 independent journalists arrested in a massive crackdown between September and October that year for reporting on an open letter by a group of prominent dissident politicians within Eritrea's ruling party popularly known as the Group of 15 or G-15 and conducting related interviews. In their letter, the G-15 had denounced President Isaias Afwerki's abuse of power and called his actions 'illegal and unconstitutional'. In the crackdown, all independent media outlets were banned in Eritrea, and they have remained so to date. In April 2002, the detained journalists reportedly began a hunger strike in protest of their prolonged incommunicado detention, demanding a fair trial before a court of law. Shortly after the hunger strike, the detainees were separated and moved to different prisons and detention centres across Eritrea. Ever since, Fessehaye has remained in incommunicado detention and the Eritrean authorities refuse to disclose any details on his location, health, and wellbeing. Based on unverified reports attributed to ex-prison guards, Fessehaye is thought to have died in 2006 or 2007 due to poor health and mistreatment in prison.





**GALAL EL-BEHAIRY :**  
EGYPT

**Galal El-Beairy** is an Egyptian poet and lyricist known for his criticism of the authorities. El-Beairy was arrested in March 2018 at Cairo International Airport on his return from travels abroad. He initially faced charges of ‘joining a terrorist group’, ‘disseminating false news’, and ‘insulting the President’ for lyrics he had written for the song Balaha, performed and disseminated online by exiled Egyptian singer Ramy Essam. This case was eventually dropped, but El-Beairy remained in detention, serving a three-year prison term for allegedly ‘disseminating false news and rumours’ and ‘insulting the Egyptian army’ in his unpublished poetry collection, *The Finest Women on Earth*. In July 2021, when his prison sentence expired, El-Beairy was subjected to enforced disappearance for three weeks before being freshly charged with ‘disseminating false news’ and ‘joining a terrorist group’ by the Supreme State Security Prosecution. Along with other detainees, he joined a collective hunger strike for several weeks in February 2022 to protest against their arbitrary detention. Galal El-Beairy’s family has informed PEN International that his health has significantly deteriorated due to his imprisonment, poor prison conditions, and lack of adequate medical care. PEN International calls for his immediate and unconditional release.



**JOSÉ RUBÉN ZAMORA  
MARROQUÍN :**  
GUATEMALA

On 29 July 2022, renowned Guatemalan journalist **José Rubén Zamora Marroquín** was arrested at his home by the National Civil Police on trumped-up charges of money laundering, blackmailing, influence peddling and conspiracy to launder money. On the same day his bank accounts were frozen. On 30 July, the headquarters of *elPeriódico*, which he founded, were occupied by officers of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the National Civil Police. Zamora’s arrest came five days after strong accusations of corruption against several present and past government officials were published in *elPeriódico*, which focuses on investigating and exposing corruption in public administration and the private sector. The Guatemalan authorities must immediately and unconditionally release José Rubén Zamora Marroquín and end all criminal proceedings against him.



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## TEESTA SETALVAD : INDIA

**Teesta Setalvad** is a writer, journalist, and human rights defender. On 25 June 2022, Gujarat anti-terror police detained Setalvad at her home in Mumbai, the capital of the neighbouring state of Maharashtra, on allegations of ‘criminal conspiracy’ and ‘forging evidence’ as part of her efforts to seek government accountability for the 2002 Gujarat Riots, a period of inter-communal violence that led to the deaths of hundreds of Indian citizens. Setalvad has alleged that she was assaulted by two members of the anti-terror police when she requested permission to speak with her lawyer. Just one day before Setalvad’s detention, on 24 June the Supreme Court rejected a plea submitted by Setalvad and co-petitioner Zakia Jafri, whose husband, the former parliamentarian Ehsan Jafri, was killed during the riots. The plea sought to reopen an investigation into the potential involvement of local government officials in the violence. On 2 September 2022, Setalvad was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court. She is subject to monitoring and her movements are restricted while the legal case against her remains ongoing.



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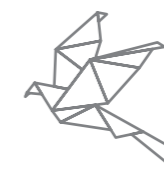
## VOLODYMYR VAKULENKO : UKRAINE

On 28 November 2022, DNA analysis carried out by Ukrainian forensic and war crimes investigators confirmed that the body found in grave N.319 in the woods of Iziurm, Eastern Ukraine, was that of award-winning Ukrainian writer **Volodymyr Vakulenko**. News that he had been abducted first emerged in April, but information about his fate was only made possible after the Ukrainian army recaptured Iziurm from Russian forces in September. According to Vakulenko’s family, members of the Russian forces raided his home on 22 March 2022, seizing phones, documents, and books in Ukrainian. A day later, they took Vakulenko and his son Vitalii, diagnosed with autism. They undressed the writer to inspect his tattoos and beat him. Both were allowed to return home the following day. Vakulenko subsequently decided to bury his war diary under a cherry tree in his garden. Around 11 am on 24 March, a bus with a Z-sign drove up to Vakulenko’s house and took him towards Iziurm. His relatives never saw him again. PEN International utterly condemns the killing of Vakulenko and calls for those responsible to be brought to justice. PEN International further condemns the violence unleashed by Russian forces against Ukraine and urges the Russian Federation to immediately end the war in Ukraine.



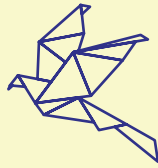
## JULIAN ASSANGE : UNITED KINGDOM

Wikileaks founder and publisher **Julian Assange** was arrested in April 2019 at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had been given asylum for almost seven years. He was arrested for breaching his bail conditions in 2012, and further arrested on behalf of the US authorities under an extradition warrant for his role in obtaining and publishing classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010. In the US, Assange would face trial on 17 counts under the Espionage Act and one count under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which combined could see him imprisoned for up to 175 years. On 17 June 2022, the UK Home Secretary approved his extradition. His legal team has lodged an appeal at the UK High Court. PEN International has repeatedly stressed that Assange's prosecution raises profound concerns about freedom of the press and sends a dangerous signal to journalists and publishers worldwide. PEN International calls on the US authorities to drop the charges against Assange and withdraw their extradition request. PEN International further calls on the UK authorities to refrain from extraditing Assange and to release him from prison immediately.



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Chair: Germán Rojas



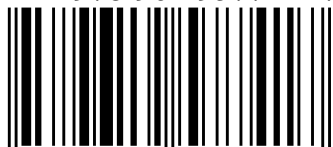
Prispevki za okrogle mize v slovenščini, francoščini, španščini in angleščini  
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