

# The Representation of Croatia through English Translations in World Literature on the Example of the Translation of Davor Špišić's Novel Ples s mladom

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Topalović, Monica Melinda

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(dvopredmetni)

**Monica Melinda Topalović**

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Diplomski rad

Studentica:

Monica Melinda Topalović

Mentor:

izv. prof. art. Tomislav Kuzmanović

Zadar, 2020.



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## 1. Introduction

Translation as a process has always been a debatable issue. Does the translation truly represent the original or is it a new original piece of art? What is translated and how is it translated? Is it translated to suit the reader, the author or the market? How does a translation represent the original culture of the text? What is the role of the translator? These are only a few questions that occur when entering the world of translation. Translating is not just the process of rewriting a certain text but it also includes rewriting emotions, language, ideologies and culture.

This is confirmed by translation theorist Susan Bassnett and scholar of Post-colonialism and Translation Studies Harish Trivedi, in their introduction to *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, where they claim that even though translations are regularly embedded in the cultural, political and historical spheres of societies, the process of translation has been identified as a purely aesthetic act for an extremely long period and ideological problems have not been taken into consideration (6). This leads us to state that translating texts from non-Western countries cannot be observed as a pure aesthetic act as Westerners consistently have different intentions and missions in presenting translated texts. Through one approach, we may say that non-Western countries only contain history and identity through the influence of the West meaning that translation is no longer merely prone to linguistic problems but “it is an aesthetic and ideological problem with an important bearing on the question of literary history” (Devy 186). Having said this, the translation of literature from a minor literary space reveals many questions about the primary goal of translation. Is it such a pure act, one that only rewrites the words of the original text, spreading the voice of those unheard and with that fulfilling word literature? Or does translating ‘minor’ literature only exist to increase one’s literary and cultural capital hence widening the access to the literary market?

The Balkan area is not usually considered a colonized area, however, the Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, gives us an insight on how most of the countries of the Balkan area can be identified as those who have undergone the process of colonization. Due to this, it is important to then analyse the literature that is being translated from these countries to the domain of world literature and to see how these countries are being represented through these translations.

In this MA thesis, the representation of Croatia through the literature that is being translated into the English language will be analysed. With this, the ideological view of Croatia as a post-Yugoslav nation represented in world literature that is, in the Anglophone speaking literary space, will be explained. Also, a case study of my original translation of the novel *Ples s mladom* written by Davor Špišić, which can be identified as one of the novels that contain the ideological representation of Croatia in world literature, will be included. During the analysis of the translation, the cultural, ideological and political factors that influence the translation of the novel will be taken into consideration.

As actors in world literature, translators may believe that they are not prone to certain manipulations and discourses put forward by the dominant literary system. They make pieces of art, not products to sell. However, to succeed in a major literary system especially while translating a text from a minor system, a minor unknown language, they must accept the fact that even the decision of choosing a certain text to translate but also in choosing certain strategies during the translation process is influenced by a discourse. To gain success a translator must conform to certain discourses presented by the mainstream culture. Even though the translator does not have as much fame as the original author he/she does have the power in making an original text more visible in a major literary system hence bring more economic, social and cultural capital to a minor literary system on the literary market. The

translator does not only rewrite but he/she has a major role in representing the original culture but also presenting it to world literature.



## 2. Translating Literature from a Minor Literary System to a Major Literary System

In his essay “The Position of Translated Literature Within the Literary Polysystem”, Itamar Even-Zohar claims that every literary work is part of a literary system which is influenced by a cultural, social, historical and literary framework. He uses the concept polysystem as he believes that there is a system of literature, as a national literature, within the system of literature as world literature (46). There are many definitions of the concept of *world literature*. Some follow the idea of Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* who claims that world literature is meant to be available to everyone (qtd in Casanova 14), which presents a logical definition of ‘world literature’, literature that belongs to the whole world which includes everyone. However, some may follow Nietzsche’s idea, putting the concept under quotation marks (Hoesel-Uhlig 27), as the concept may be an idealistic concept, thus not representing what it should. Furthermore, as stated by Andrea Pisac in her article “Big Nations’ Literature and Small Nations’ Sociology”, although world literature tries to present itself as equal it is only appointed to Western-origin literature, nevertheless literature in the English language (“Big Nations” 190) meaning that it necessarily does not belong to everyone.

In our case, Croatian literature would be a national literature within the system of world literature. Even-Zohar continues alleging that specific literary spaces do not have a fixed position in the world of literature, but that certain positions shape the centre (primary position) and periphery (secondary position) of the polysystem. Those in the centre are part of a major literature which influences a minor literature that is placed in the peripheral of the polysystem. He asserts that it is easier for a major literature to enter the second position to influence the minor literature than the contrary process (47-48). The division of major-minor, centre-periphery, primary-secondary, East-West, We-Other, appear in many spheres of society, in the social, economic, cultural, political and the literary sphere. Certain authors, such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, the Vietnamese literary theorist, in her essay “No Master

Territories”, note that without the margin (minor, secondary, East, Other), the centre (major, primary, West, We) does not exist, the centre only exists with the presence of the margin (197). Consequently, although a minor literary system has little influence over world literature, its existence is crucial for the existence of the centre. Croatian literature can then be defined as a minor literature, hence consistently part of world literature, but on the margin of the literary system. However, even when translated, it will never have the true etiquette of a major literature although it then enters the literary space of a major literary system.

If we use Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory as a foundation for this thesis, we see that there must be differences in the literature that belongs to the major system and the minor system. We cannot only perceive the quality of the text to define the position in a polysystem, moreover, context portrays a crucial act in positioning (Even-Zohar 48). Pascale Casanova in her book *The World Republic of Letters* and David Damrosch in his book *What is World Literature?* share similar approaches as they also believe that the context is important when analysing a work of literature. Casanova, like Even-Zohar, segregates literary space into two divisions, however, she identifies them as global literary space and internationalized literary space. She believes that ‘world literature’ or as she calls it the ‘world of letters’ is a space that is unified through the opposition to national literature, as the oldest and the best, and can be recognized in Even-Zohar’s terms as major literature, and to new literature, that is poorer in comparison to national literature, which can be recognized as minor literature (Casanova 83). Even though the division of literature is understood differently by the above-mentioned authors, it is crucial to show that segregation in world literature exists which is important to note as we will be analysing what type of literature has the opportunity to be translated from a minor to a major language.

Another correlation between Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory and Casanova’s republic of letters can be distinguished when Casanova clarifies that there are inequalities in

the world of literature in which the hierarchy of the literary world contributes to the whole idea of literature giving literature its complete form. By cause of this hierarchy, the literary world is a world of competition where 'we fight' for literary legitimacy (39-41). This is similar to how Even-Zohar interprets a major literary system within the polysystem – as one that holds the primary position and has dominance over the secondary positions (47-48). A clear example of this can be Croatian literature as it has no importance outside the borders of the minor literary space, and, as a consequence, even if translated, it will never dominate over literature written in the language of a major literary space.

Other than the hierarchy of the literary system, an important factor for a text to survive in world literature, in agreement with Casanova, is language, as it portrays a specific part in the involvement of a country in the literary market. Those who are illiterate in a particular world language have fewer chances in increasing literary capital which is important for entering the literary market (14-16). According to Casanova, the literary market is composed of literary capital and literary credit. Literary capital includes objects such as the number of books, number of publishing houses, but also the so-called 'literary prestige' - countries which have been highly ranked in the literary hierarchy by cause of their tradition in the sphere of literature (14-16). Furthermore, in her article, Pisac claims that the literary market can mobilise writers and their texts to contribute to increasing literary capital ("Big Nations" 187) confirming that aspects other than literary quality influence the entrance of translated texts into world literature. Moreover, Croatian literature in the Croatian language would barely reach any recognition outside the border of the Balkans, whereas, when translated, the text is accessible to a larger community, which then brings more recognition to Croatia, its culture and its literature. Furthermore, Croatian literature has many aspects of a minor literary space, the Croatian language does not belong to a world language and the country has only been independent for less than 30 years. Also, the Balkan or post-

Yugoslav/ex-Yugoslav culture differs from the dominant Anglophone culture which then influences the context of the texts that are written in the area.

### 2.1. Cultural Context

As we have mentioned above, when discussing what factors are important to identify with regards to world literature, we must not only emphasize quality and language but also the context as it is necessary for determining where a text will be positioned within a literary system and space. Context may be defined by historical, social, cultural and political events. The two cultural systems in which texts are embedded are cultural context and the textual grid (Bassnett, Lefevre). They derive from the works of Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, philosopher and anthropologist. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu explains cultural capital as one of the three capitals one should contain to be accepted in a high circle of society (114). The other two are economic and social capital. When someone/something contains all three capitals, they are placed in a high position in the hierarchy of society. We can declare that Croatian literature has cultural capital as it contains many famous authors, such as Krleža, Andrić and more recently, Drakulić, Ugrešić and Jergović, which have been translated into the English language (and also many other world languages), nonetheless, it lacks economic and social capital when identifying its literary space.

As a consequence of lacking one of the capitals, many countries, such as Croatia, promote the process of Westernisation and the translation of Anglophone literature to improve the cultural capital of the population. Despite this, the process also proceeds in a contrary manner, where certain minor literary spaces, such as Croatia, propose the translation of their national literature into the English language, for the nation and literature to be recognized in the world, hence, increasing their economic capital, but also social capital, as

they are then recognized as a fraction of world literature. With this, they can obtain a higher position in the global literary space (Casanova 14) and also connect themselves to specific spheres in the literary market. Nonetheless, during the process of increasing literary capital, countries aim to follow the ideology internalized by the major literary space, the ideology that is preferable for the literary market. In the case of Croatian literature, any literature that has a post-Yugoslav, nostalgic tone contributes to a profitable discourse, and, as Tijana Matijević claims in her article “Post-Yugoslav Film and Literature Production: an Alternative to Mainstream Political and Cultural Discourse”, the commodification of the concept post-Yugoslav is a consequence of the free market and neoliberal publishers (105).

To understand the commodification of the post-Yugoslav concept it is important to explain the concept of *free market*. Andrea Pisac in her dissertation, *Trusted Tales: Ccreating Authenticity in Literary Representation from ex-Yugoslavia*, discusses the concept of free market, in opposition to the market in socialist Yugoslavia, as a positive outcome and idea when compared to the former socialist market. As censorship was vivid in socialist Yugoslavia, many authors could write but had to modify it to the themes approved by the regime. After the fall of the regime, the free market seemed like a democratic system for the writers, the availability to write about wanted themes freely (Pisac, *Trusted Tales* 85). However, a discourse of Croatia as a post-Yugoslav nation was constructed, making the free market a restricted one, very similar to the one that was present during the socialist era.

## 2.2. Textual Grids

Not only is it essential to mention the cultural context in the translation process but also, according to Susan Bassnett and the Belgian translation theorist, Andre Lefevere, the textual grid of literature, as they believe it is equally important, if not even more significant. Bassnett and Lefevere claim that some cultures (French, German and English) share a

common textual grid which derives from the Christian and Greco-Roman tradition. For example, the textual grid of Asian countries differs from the mentioned French, German and English, but they share similarities (e.g. Chinese and Japanese). They assert that textual grids are constructs which reflect patterns of expectation that have been institutionalised by the members of a given culture, therefore, translators must pay attention to this while translating (*Constructing Cultures* 5). Croatian literature has a very similar textual grid to other Balkan countries, closer to former Yugoslav countries, such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovenia, but also, Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, as they can also be included in the Balkan textual grid. Consequently, particular cultural references must be adjusted in the translating process as a result of cultural differences for the target culture reader to easily understand the context.

Issues and difficulties that can occur during a translation process can be prescribed to differences in textual grids. These differences are as problematic as differences in language especially in between Western and other (non-Western) cultures. Bassnett and Lefevere argue that Western cultures have constructed non-Western cultures by translating them into Western categories – a process which distorts and falsifies (*Constructing Cultures* 5-8). Damrosch shares a similar approach stating that “[A]ll works cease to be exclusive products of their original culture once they are translated; all become works that only “began” in their original language” (22), meaning that, even though a translator tries to transfer the image of the culture of an original text they are translating, the true image will not be transferred, but rather a new cultural image of the original, a distorted image. When it comes to translations of Croatian literature, the clearest examples are translations, or rather transfers, of Croatian tradition. Croatian customs and traditions differ considerably from Anglo-American customs and traditions and it is expected that some may not be transferred fully, thus a new image of the tradition may appear in the translation. Similarly, trying to translate certain norms, values,

family names and dialects also falls under tradition and will have the same outcome. The problem that occurs in the representation of Croatia through a translation is that a distorted image is constructed to meet the expectations of the audience, that is, the distorted image follows an ideology which is represented in the major literary system. The translator might use a target-oriented approach which will as a consequence domesticate the context by forming a new vision of the whole work by making it accessible for the target audience to understand. He/She may choose the source-oriented approach but as a consequence, the translator will foreignize the text according to his/her perception of the culture which may not be similar to how the original culture perceives itself. Either way, a translated work can never be the same as it was in its original state.

### 2.3. Patronage

Andre Lefevere, like previously mentioned authors, in his article “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature” also emphasizes context by stating that, world literature is not simply a body of texts but a body made of persons and institutions who/which extend the idea of *patronage*. Patronage, according to Lefevere, consists of three major components: an ideological, an economic and a status component, which all influence the literary system directly (“Mother Courage’s” 236). With this approach, we can observe that it is not simply the quality of the literary text that influences the positioning of it in world literature, but many different factors such as history, ideology (which contributes to discourse), money and the status of the author and translator. The consequences of these actions are that we can not declare that what we are reading is indeed the best piece of literary text from a certain country. This is important to emphasize when discussing translations from a minor literary system (e.g. Croatian literary system) to a major (e.g. English-speaking literary system), as a translator accepts the discourse presented in the

major system of the minor system as the work will have more success. This success will enable the translator to accomplish a literary status in the major literary system. Also, Lawrence Venuti, in his book *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an Ethics of Difference*, claims that during a translation process the translator may use “a domestic representation of a foreign culture” (*The Scandals* 73), meaning that it promotes the cultural constituency of the dominant literary space. A Croatian novel written by a student with no literary status and without transferring a text with the appropriate discourse might then never enter world literature, while a new novel by Ugrešić, Drakulić, Jergović or maybe even a less familiar author, but with a post-Yugoslav/Balkan theme, will enter the foreign system more easily.

Andrea Pisac in her doctorate thesis *Trusted Tales: Creating Authenticity in Literary Representation from ex-Yugoslavia* shows how Ugrešić and Drakulić are the only Croatian authors who have had their whole body of literary work translated in the UK. Jergović is the third author on the list (*Trusted Tales* 139). Even though the authors are exiles, they write about post-Yugoslav themes: war, corruption, exiles, Croat/Serb relations, nostalgia, etc., similar to other novels being translated from contemporary Croatian to English but not as recognized. With this, we can see that patronage has a great role in the translation process as before a translator begins “rewriting”, certain decisions, which are undoubtedly going to influence the success of the translated work, must be made.



### 3. The Influence of Refraction, Inscription and Remainder in the Translation Process

After explaining certain factors that influence the translation of books from Croatian to English and difficulties that may appear due to different cultural contexts and textual grids, it is important to mention concepts that influence the strategies a translator chooses while translating a source text from a completely different cultural background than the target culture.

Certain aspects, such as *refraction*, *inscription* and *remainder* are important to mention, when discussing the translator's choice of certain strategies in the translation process. Lefevere introduces the concept of refraction by saying that it is the circumstance in which we adapt a work of literature to a different audience, an audience culturally and socially different from the one in which the work originated from. This means that a translated text must go through certain refractions to be adapted to the target audience. Refractions are referred to as more serious changes that are more visible in the translated text ("Mother Courage's" 235). This means that the translator has the power to influence how the audience reads the work. When translating a particular text, the translator may choose to emphasize elements that promote the discourse of the source culture in the target culture. Although these aspects are not emphasized in the original, the translator is creating a new piece of art and must adjust them to the target culture reader. This is necessary to analyse as with this the translator has a powerful role in enhancing a specific discourse about the source culture. This is also related to Lefevere's concept of patronage, which can represent patrons i.e. authors, different people and certain institutions such as publishing houses that can through certain discursive strategies extend their patronage on translators by influencing their choice of which literary works to translate ("Mother Courage's" 236).

Moreover, Venuti's concepts of inscription and remainder need to be discussed to understand the terms patronage and refractions as they influence particular choices made by

translators during the translation process. Venuti believes that the process of inscription begins with the choice of the original text, which is precisely chosen to fit the discourse presented in the target culture. This selection then motivates the choice of translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization (“Translation, Community, Utopia” 468-469). This choice can be solely made by the translator as a patron who is influenced to choose a text through patronage or by publishing houses that choose a text, therefore, provide patronage themselves. As said above, a discourse about a country exists in the major literary system and it contributes to the translator’s choice of the text for translation.

This is also connected to Casanova’s idea of a literary market (14), where a translator chooses to translate a text which will succeed in the major literary system. This brings us to a debatable conclusion where we are not sure what the primary goal of the translator is. Is the primary goal to obtain economic capital for oneself and with that a certain status in the literary world or is the translator’s primary goal to fulfill the cultural capital of a certain national literary space? In order for the translation to succeed, it has to accept the discourse about the country the original text derives from. Furthermore, Venuti explains that the concept of *remainder* is just as important as it shows that we have a specific discourse of a particular nation, hence, the translator transfers the text according to this specific discourse, e.g. the appearance of certain dialects or colloquial language in the original text (“Translation, Community, Utopia” 471). The translator then has to decide whether to translate this element by domesticating it, which may present a new discourse of the original culture without presenting the original idea of the text (“Translation, Community, Utopia” 471).

Some short examples of both inscription and remainder can be observed in the translations of the titles of Croatian works already translated into English: *Our Man in Iraq* (*Naš čovjek na terenu*) and *Hotel Tito* (*Hotel Zagorje*). *Our Man in Iraq* was domesticated to

influence the reader by giving a simple understanding of the original text through the use of a discourse present in the target culture rather than the domestic culture. A similar idea was accomplished in *Hotel Tito*, where the translated title emphasizes the socialist/communist regime in Croatia at the time. Thus, many different features influence the direction in which a work of literature enters world literature, the emphasis is not only on the literary quality but also on discourse and ideologies that influence what will be translated and how it will be incorporated into world literature.

This shows that the dominant hegemonic force of the Western world, which holds the dominant literary space of world literature, can transform the nature of how a literary work is presented in the original culture. Furthermore, prestigious literary culture does not only transform the nature of how a certain culture perceives its own literary space but also how they recognize their creators of literary space. In this transformation process, translators have a major role as they choose certain texts to translate – texts that usually follow the presently assumed ideology of a nation (e.g. many of the Croatian novels translated into English are about the Homeland War). The translators follow the idea of Sjon: “[R]eaders don’t want to hear how similar two cultures are, but how different they are – they want to learn about another country by focusing on the differences only if those differences are told in the language that is communicable enough for them” (qtd in Pisac “Big Nations” 199).

### 3.1. Fluency and Transparency

Discussing the above-mentioned concepts which influence the translation process we come to the point where it is crucial to explain the terms fluency and transparency which occur in translation theory. According to Clifford E. Landers, and his book *Literary Translation. A Practical Guide* a translated text should produce the same reaction, emotional

and psychological, in the target language reader, as in the original text. The success of the translated text then depends on the fact if it is read like a translation or an original piece of art. He continues to claim that a translated text must leave as little evidence as possible of the original text as it is one of the factors that readers accept when defining if a translation is 'a good translation' (49). Lawrence Venuti presents a similar conclusion as he states that a translation is judged by its fluency meaning that it represents the original writing and meaning of the original author. The translated text is then "not, in fact, a translation but the original" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 1). Venuti continues that the invisibility or visibility of the translator then depends on the fluency of the translated text, the more fluency the translation provides the more invisible the translator (*The Translator's Invisibility* 1). Transparency is closely related to fluency and according to Landers, it is the translator's choice to which level of transparency he or she will go to in the translated text (49). Furthermore, Venuti claims that a translator becomes invisible by producing an illusionary effect of transparency where the translation seems like it is the original and not a translated text (*The Translator's Invisibility* 5).

Some translators may choose a different perspective and approach while translating and exclude the whole concept of fluency. This approach is called *resistance* according to Landers and it refers to translators who "deliberately avoid excluding any elements that betray the "otherness" of the text's origin" (52). Translators that accept this approach believe that a translation should be read like a translation. Lawrence Venuti also mentions the strategy of resistance claiming that during the translation process it contributes to the notion of abusive fidelity meaning that the translation, on one hand, resists the ideology of the mainstream culture, in this case, the Anglophone culture but on the other hand shows resistance in transferring the original text by not providing a fluent translation (*The Translator's Invisibility* 252). This shows that the translator is neither faithful to the original

text nor the target culture reader. It is also important to mention Schleiermacher's concept of foreignizing translation which is closely related to the concept of resistance. In short, it refers to a specific selection of foreign texts which do not follow the discursive ideas of the dominant hegemonic powers (*The Translator's Invisibility* 97). This means that a translator chooses a specific text to translate knowing that even when translated in will not follow the internalized discourse of the original culture in the dominant culture.

This approach is opposite to fluency, however, it is important to mention it in this translation case study as it presents a difficult decision for the translator. Will the translation of a Croatian novel have more success in the target culture if it is fluent or if it is read like a translation? Do the readers want otherness or not? Whichever approach is chosen it influences the way a certain culture is represented in a different literary system. How will the Croatian culture be represented in the Anglophone literary system and which approach will bring success to the translated text? The approach which the translator chooses may not only follow principles of an idealistic translation theory but also the ideologies of the translator. According to the literary translator Francis R. Jones, in his article "Ethics, Aesthetics and *Décision*: Literary Translating in the Wars of the Yugoslav Succession", translators of texts from former Yugoslavia are not leashed from certain personal loyalties nor political or cultural ideologies which brings difficulties in these ethical decisions of which approach to use while translating (712). Translating a text and making it an original piece of work may confirm fluency and be highly accepted by the target culture reader, however, is it ethical to deprive the translation of all the aspects of otherness as it then degrades the original culture itself?

#### 4. The Representation of Croatia in World Literature

All of the aspects mentioned above are important when analysing the representation of Croatia through English translations of Croatian contemporary literature (from 1991 onwards, during and after the Homeland War) in world literature. As a result of differences in specific aspects such as language, historical and social context (post-Yugoslav nation), Balkanism as a textual grid and also writers that have been translated into the English language in the past, a certain ideology of Croatia has been constructed: a post-war, post-Yugoslav country. This construct can influence what type of a literary text a translator will choose just as it can influence the author to write a text with a specific theme constructed to succeed in the major literary system, hence, in world literature.

Croatian literature, as said above, holds a position in the minor literary space. As it will never hold a position of dominance, it can only enter a major literature by being translated into a major language, such as English, hence being accessible to a larger number of readers, a larger literary market. Casanova explains how postcolonial nations (we can refer to Croatia as a post-colonial country) are placed on the periphery of the international literary space meaning they have trouble in reaching the centre due to the dominant literary space (81). According to Todorova, in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, the Balkans have been identified as the “other” of Europe and although Balkanism has evolved separately from Orientalism it is only viewed as different as a result of specific differences in geolocation, religion and tradition. The Balkan area has never been recognized as colonized so it has not been of interest to post-colonial critics. Despite the fact, she claims that the Balkans are not viewed “as an incomplete other; instead, they are constructed not as other but as incomplete self” (16-21). We cannot clearly define Balkan countries as post-colonized, as they are regarded as being closer to the West or as a bridge between the West and the East,

nonetheless, they share certain aspects as post-colonized countries which relate to their position in the literary system.

As said previously, this periphery of international space can be recognized as Even-Zohar's peripheral secondary position in the literary polysystem. This may be one of the reasons why many postcolonial writers, people from colonized countries, write in English: it is an effortless alternative to enter the dominant literary space (Casanova) or the primary position in the literary polysystem (Even-Zohar). As Andrea Pisac, in her article "Big Nations' Literature and Small Nations' Sociology" claims "(...) English-speaking writers were not burdened with the role of representing any particular 'culture', writers from small nations were expected to act as ambassadors of their 'culture as a whole'" ("Big Nations" 204).

Also, even though Croatian writers hardly tend to write in English, there is a certain similarity in the themes of writing which succeed in the major literary system. Moreover, many writers may then aim to adjust the themes to those that follow the ideology of the nation represented in the global literary space, thus the text will be easily accepted in the Anglophone literary space. A text is more valued when in English as it is the dominant, powerful, colonizers' language, available for everyone to understand. Therefore, the question arises: is the image of Croatia captured in these translations a true presentation of the nation or merely a representation of what is appropriate in the Western world, an image constructed by the major literary space, an image that exists only to be accepted by the receiving audience? Representation, according to Stuart Hall, is a shared meaning about someone/something in an inferior position constructed by the superior. It is a distorted shared meaning of the inferior that serves the superior. The shared meaning does not present it but represents it through the eyes of the superior. Representation is connected to culture through language (Hall 1-18), which is essential for this thesis, as the discourse a translator promotes

through the language in a literary text influences the representation of the source culture. As Pisac claims, there is a large amount of editorial control when referring to translated texts. Emphasis is put on “acceptable style, pertinent themes, the right amount of foreignness, commercial potential” (*Trusted Tales* 188) confirming once again that literary quality is not the essential factor present in discussing which text will enter world literature.

#### 4.1. Croatian Literature = Post-Yugoslav Literature = Balkan Literature

In her book *Imaging the Balkans*, Maria Todorova states that the attempt of Yugoslavs not to identify themselves as Balkan, but as a part of Central Europe, has been present from the Cold War. The Yugoslavs belong to a different ‘species’, different from those in the Balkans, despite this, she claims that even though they fixate their effort into deconstructing the self-identification with the Balkans, the discourse is so powerful that they consequently internalize it (Todorova 20, 52). As the Balkan area commonly holds negative connotations for some, many countries such as Croatia try to exclude any connection to the Balkans. Entering the EU was believed to be one of those steps, a step to be identified as a part of the West. Despite this, even in the EU, Croatia holds the position of the margin, as it is a smaller country and most recently entered the union. It is valuable to Europe though, as Europe needs the Balkans (and Croatia) as decentralization is impossible without having a margin. Although Croatia can to some extent distance itself from the Balkan discourse, the post-Yugoslav or ex-Yugoslav feature can barely be ignored.

As Tijana Matijević states in her article “Post-Yugoslav Film and Literature Production: an Alternative to Mainstream Political and Cultural Discourse”, when we discuss post-Yugoslav we are identifying a cultural concept or even an economic-political realm, therefore, literature considered post-Yugoslav is a result of cultural production from countries that inhabit the post-Yugoslav space (101). When referring to literature and texts that are



being translated into the English language, many translated authors write about the Balkans but hardly identify themselves as being Balkan. Todorova mentions Drakulić, who writes about the Balkans, however, she does not identify herself as a Balkan (54). For some writers, it may be easier to relate to being post-Yugoslav or ex-Yugoslav as the problems in certain countries can then be ascribed to a system they were in (in this case, Communism, or Socialism as they like to call it in the Balkans) before they were democratised and before they were directed towards the process of Westernization and Globalization. Not only this, but the post-Yugoslav discourse may also have more positive connotations to individuals since it is a concept 'accepted' by the West. Literary texts in this domain will then be accepted if the major themes of their writing include this discourse.

The influence of the post-Yugoslav ideology can be viewed in the type of literature being produced in Croatia after the Homeland War and also in the type of literature being translated from Croatian to other world languages. In his article "Contemporary Croatian Prose Literature: from Historical Fiction to Autobiography", Boris Škvorc claims that there has been a change in the type of literature in contemporary Croatian literature from the mid-1990s. The hybrid autobiography, a mixture of historical events and personal perspectives, is represented as a prominent feature of that period (112). Here we see that context, be it historical, social or economic, can even influence the popularity of a specific genre in national literature. Furthermore, to present the specific discourse promoted about Croatia in world literature, we can list the titles of certain novels translated from Croatian to English. *Have a Nice Day: from the Balkan War to the American Dream*, *Culture of Lies*, *Ministry of Pain*, and *Baby Yaga Laid an Egg* by Ugrešić, furthermore, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, *The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War*, *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, and *As if I'm not there: A Novel About the Balkans*, by Drakulić and *Sarajevo Marlboro* by Jergović. We can assume what are the main themes of

these novels and what we can expect to read in them. Some more recent examples are the above-mentioned novels Perišić's novel *Naš čovjek na terenu (Our Man in Iraq)* and *Hotel Zagorje (Hotel Tito)* by Ivana Bodrožić.

According to Andrea Pisac, during the 1990s particular Croatian books that were translated into the English language contributed to the success of other books from the region (*Trusted Tales* 178). The war was then a current event and the world wanted to read about it, it was something that would increase sales, which is then related to the literary market, literary capital and certain ideologies promoted by these novels that had become recognized at the time. Is it possible for novels that do not hold this theme, to be accepted in the Anglophone literary space? We can conclude that the notion of Croatia as a post-Yugoslav and/or Balkan nation has been internalized into all spheres, even literary space.

## 5. Davor Špišić and his Novel *Ples s mladom*

Davor Špišić, born in 1962 in Osijek, is well known as a playwright and prose writer. He has written many novels such as *Koljivo*, which won the VBZ Award for the best unpublished novel in 2004, *Slavonska krv*, *Svlačenje smrada*, and *Ples s mladom*. His most popular plays are *Dobrodošli u rat!*, *Rubnosti*, *Godina do berbe* and *Jug 2*. He lives and works in Osijek as a professional writer. Many of his novels and plays contain war themes which is one of the reasons his novel *Ples s mladom* was chosen for this translation case study, as it contributes to the main focus of this MA thesis – the representation of Croatia through English translations in world literature. This novel, other than having the Homeland War as one of the main themes, also shows the relations between Croatian soldiers and Serbian civilians as well as certain influences the war had on people, mostly soldiers, years after the war.

### 5.1. The Analysis of the Translation of Part 3 *Babin Dvor* from *Ples s mladom* by Davor Špišić

Even though the novel *Ples s mladom* is an easy read, many difficulties appeared during the translation process. These difficulties are closely related to specific decisions made throughout the translation process which would reflect the representation of Croatia in the Anglophone literary space. The main conflict that appeared during the translation process was the choice of which translation strategy to use in certain segments. In some situations, the representation of Croatia would follow the transparent discourse already presented in the Western world, while in others, it would confirm to resistance by presenting the original image of the Croatian culture producing a non-fluent translation.

One of the first difficulties was present during the process of choosing a novel to translate for this thesis. Firstly, one of Špišić's novels has already been translated into the

English language so he is already a part of world literature, which provides an easier entrance for another one of his novels. Secondly, I chose the novel as I believe it would easily enter world literature due to the themes that spread through the novel. My choice of this novel is a clear example of Lawrence Venuti's concept of inscription ("Translation, Community, Utopia" 468-469) as the patrons of the dominant literary space have already internalized a discourse of Croatia and the Croatian culture, thus choosing a novel which represents a transparent discourse allows larger success for the translated text. Schleiermacher's concept of foreignizing translation mentioned before also confirms this as he claims that the first stage of foreignizing a text appears with the choice of text. One can resist the dominant culture by choosing a text that does not conform to the internalized discourse (*The Translator's Invisibility* 97).

Having said this we see that the novel *Ples s mladom* follows the discourse of Croatia as a post-Yugoslav nation which is, through popular translated novels, already represented in the Anglophone literary space as a transparent discourse. Following this, the translation has a larger possibility to succeed in such a literary space as it follows the demands of the target culture reader. Not only does the novel have a war theme, but it also includes executions, Croatian traditions, Serbs, sex scenes, a homosexual love story, homicide, contributing to the foreignness of the text, making it more preferable for the target culture reader. The novel emphasizes foreignness by presenting Croatians as barbaric Balkans, making them exotic and prone to the acceptance of the Anglophone literary space. Furthermore, the ethical artistic question arose, do we choose texts that are of high literary quality, texts that need to be heard from a minor literary space or are they chosen to please the reader and target culture?

Translation as a process may be seen as a simple task of rewriting words, however, as it also transfers cultures through language it is obvious that the concept of representation will appear. Translating is not then just rewriting and transferring cultures but also deciding how

we will represent these cultures. Will we follow the transparent discourse and represent them in favour of the target culture audience or will we show resistance by excluding the transparent discourse? The choice is difficult and may not always be the same through the translation process as the translator may flow between the transparent discourse and the original presentation of the culture. However, the translator needs to balance these decisions while translating. During the process of translating the novel *Ples s mladom* one of the main difficulties was deciding which translation strategy to use in certain situations: strategies to conform to the transparent discourse or those which conform to resistance.

As said at the beginning of this thesis, translating literature from a minor language to a major is quite different than the opposite process. When referring to translating English literature into the Croatian language, the process may be simplified as English as a universal language has entered the cultural grid in Croatia. As a result of mass media and mass improvements in technology, many Croatian speaking users identify certain cultural rituals, norms and traditions deriving from the English-speaking community naturally. Not only do they understand them, but some have also been internalized into the Croatian society. Consequently, the translator has a somewhat simplified task when translating English texts into Croatian. Despite this, in the opposite process, translating from Croatian to English, many difficulties appear. Although people are aware of Croatia as a country and may know some facts about the Croatian culture through a transparent discourse present, many aspects of this precise culture are unknown, thus, when revealed through the translation process, differ from the internalized discourse. This then influences the choice of translation strategy as the target reader is also as important as the original text and a translation has to be not only faithful to the original but also the audience.

Even though we do have many translation strategies, such as the target-oriented approach which as a consequence brings us to domesticating a certain text and the source-

oriented approach which as a consequence bring us to foreignizing the text, it does not make the translation process uncomplicated but rather justifies the choices considered by the translator. Most of the difficulties that appeared while translating this novel from Croatian to English were mainly connected to the cultural context and textual grid, as the Balkan textual grid differs from the Anglophone in all aspect. These difficulties are then related to the representation of Croatia through a translated text. Due to these difficulties, there was a constant dilemma whether to obtain fluency throughout the whole translated text by simplifying certain segments or to show resistance by letting the translation read like a translation, in this case, by being faithful to the original text and leaving a trace of foreignness. One of the strategies used to enlarge feelings of strangeness and foreignness in the target culture, according to Lawrence Venuti is through resistance. The main goal of resistance then is to free the reader and also the translator of the internalized discourse in the target culture by excluding them from the translation. Resistance allows the reader to then sense a notion of cultural other in the translated text (*The Translator's Invisibility* 263, 264).

Certain sections of the translation of Špišić's novel are translated using the resistance approach which leads to a non-fluent translation. Due to this, the translator is visible (deliberately or not), following the idea of Lawrence Venuti and opposing the concept of *translator's invisibility* (*Translator's Invisibility* 1, 13), by resisting to create a fluent and transparent translation. In this case, certain Croatian words such as *Babin Dvor*, *šljivovica*, *ćevapi* and *burek (gibanica)* (Špišić 123, 153, 158) were not omitted in the translation. The main reason is the cultural importance of certain terms that complement the context in which the novel is written. Consequently, the translation may not be read with such fluency, as with these words it presents a foreignizing translation (*The Translator's Invisibility* 97), however, the goal of this case study is not to provide a fluent translation but rather show how this translation would represent the Croatian culture in world literature.

The visibility of the translator in this specific translation is necessary as it is one of the ways for the original text to enter the major literary space. The technique of including foreign words in the translation confirms to aspects of the so-called resistance theory which means that the translator, according to Landers, culturally adjusts the translation to the target culture language, by leaving source-language words in the translation (52). *Babin Dvor* is the village in which the third part of the novel is placed. As it is the name of a location it was maintained in the original form. The alcohol beverage *šljivovica* and meat dish *ćevapi* are internalized in the Anglophone speaking space mostly through the influence of media and multicultural communities in English speaking countries, so there was no need in translating them into English. All of the words kept in their original form contribute to the discourse of the Balkans where significance is placed on food and alcohol beverages as part of their Balkan identity. Even though some people from this culture may abide by this discourse it does not necessarily mean that the whole Balkan population emphasizes food and beverages. However, the ‘exotic’ food and beverages give the reader a touch of foreignness as they represent the Balkan identity giving the novel an easier opportunity to enter the dominant literary space. This also opens the question of the otherness of foreign texts, do they truly then present the original image of a culture or do these distorted, constructed images, as Maria Todorova claims in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, serve as an escape from the profane Western world (13)?

It is important to use source language words when writing about the post-war context in Croatia because of their strong meanings and discourse, nonetheless, we must ask if that will satisfy the target language reader or they distract the reader? Lawrence Venuti claims that if a translator domesticates the foreign text and erases all the “foreignness” to form a text acceptable for the publisher, hence, for the target culture, the translator shows no appreciation for the foreign culture he/she is translating, considering that culture includes all aspects such

as political, economic and social (qtd. in Bassnett 107). This shows that simplifying the translated text to the target reader's demands is not always the correct choice as it does not show appreciation for the source culture. Moreover, Pisac claims that foreignness is an essential aspect for a translation to succeed in world literature (*Trusted Tales* 188). Translating means rewriting a certain literary text but the translator must discover a balance in the amount of foreignness that is acceptable for world literature. With this, the translator may choose to leave the foreign aspects that follow the discourse of the source culture, similar to the example of using the noun *Chetnik* to translate to noun *trofazne babe*. By using the noun *Chetnik* a certain discourse that does exist in the Croatian culture towards Serbs was asserted but was not emphasized by the author in the original text. This also shows the power of the translator, being able to construct an even larger discourse through a literary text.

We see that through certain decisions made by the translator during the translation process an image of a certain culture is created, in this case of the Croats and Croatian culture. This specific novel adds to the distorted image of Croatia, a country stuck in the consequences of the Homeland War, a culture of people who committed or participated in war crimes, people who emphasize food and national symbols, who swear and show true Balkan barbaric traits. Even though the Balkan identity represented in the translation is a constructed image, Maria Todorova claims that many Balkans have internalized these traits due to the large influence and oppression of the West (54). Furthermore, emphasizing certain Balkan traits throughout the novel confirms this distorted image by putting the desires of the reader at first. This translation does not entirely follow certain 'laws' of translation as in some parts it is not fluent. However, choices made during the translation process were used to present an original image of the Croatian culture in the English language. This translation then shows that a translated text can to some point contain traces of foreignness but still be fluent enough



to interest the reader. The more interest the target audience has the more success the translation gains on the literary market giving it a larger opportunity to enter world literature.

## 5.2. Davor Špišić: *The Father-Daughter Dance* (Part 3 *Babin Dvor*)

Part 3

Babin Dvor

20:30

*The fat fuck at the door was having a hard time reading names off some sort of a list. He was tensing the muscles under his black shirt, looking at me obtusely while asking me whose side I was from – the bride’s or the groom’s? I was like fuck you man if I’m gonna tell you this important fact crucial for the state of the safety of this wedding and beyond... I will, my ass. I told him I was there by chance. That I was prowling through the city, got really thirsty, heard some good music, so I thought of inviting myself in, why not... Uh, tough guy, tough grip... He caught me in a clinch, crushing my balls with his right hand and twisting my neck with his left... But, lucky me, my guardian angels sent over Bokica who calmed the crazy TRY-2-STEEL security guy, told him everything was fine, that I’m the bride’s brother, that is, your brother, Medži...*

*I’m trying to get away from her, she’s so annoying with all these questions about where I was, why I needed such an entrance, that you’ve already eaten the meat and sauces and I’m nowhere to be seen...*

*Jesus, Sis, you look like a queen belly-dancing on the table, I see Dad over there, he’s gonna explode... His heart won’t make it... Here I am, I’m coming up, Medži... Hold your glasses...*

21.

Okay, I admit it, the movie had won some fancy award, but I found it boring.

There was hardly anyone there, no normal audience, not even any of those movie freaks. There was no one on the balcony except us three. Komba got all horny and swam into Vanja's kisses, his fingers getting all excited while unzipping his pants... The kid moaned and twisted, pulled down his pants and unleashed his happy cock. Komba got down on his knees and started sucking his balls.

And the day began when Komar fucked up.

"Last night I went over all the legal aspects of your case in detail..." Jasenko lied, peering into his notes, highlighted in yellow. "Taking all the unfavourable circumstances into consideration, if it were to come to trial, the aggravating factor is that one of the parties is an older minor..."

"Translate that, Marunić!" Komba got agitated. "Do you want them to put me on trial for murder too?!"

"You haven't got a shot," the legal consultant prejudged. "Don't even try. They won't let him leave the Home. Adoption isn't even an option. Anyway, they'd be onto you immediately and you'd have Child Services after you... If you're thinking about marriage, wake up, man, and remember where you live."

We were sipping our morning coffee on the terrace. Tonkica was digging up sand at the end of the yard.

Last night, Komba had decided to inform the rest of the gang about his forbidden love. The way he talked about Vanja made the other guys freak out...

As the time of our civil initiative was coming to an end, Komar was getting more and more nervous. He knew the days were melting through his fingers and he had to do something about it. If he wanted to start over with the love of his life.

“Be patient until Vanja turns eighteen, then you can live together,” Marunić suggested. “You can still see each till then, with caution, of course.”

“Well, yeah...” Gogi joined the conversation. “The kid can blow you here and there...”

“Don’t...” I jumped towards Komba so he really wouldn’t do something stupid.

Tonkica got interested in the fuss going on and skipped over closer to the terrace.

“It’s nothing, pumpkin, we’re just playing...” I waved to her. “Off you go honey, go play in the sandpit.”

“Tonka the bulldozer!” she squealed and ran to the sandpit.

“Yeaah, a bulldozer...” my eyes followed her. “God, what a cute little being.”

“It’s like I’ve been talking to a wall!” Komba was losing it; he could hardly light up a cigarette. “I love that boy so much it hurts. Everything aches when he’s not by me, and I’m gonna get us out of this shit. I will goddammit!”

The three of us shut up during his love confession. Unbelievably, even Gogi.

Vanja popped up onto the terrace, smiling peacefully. He had school in the afternoon. He had just gotten back from his morning workout at the pool. The loose strands of hair on his neck were still wet.

“C’mon, catch your breath, you’ve got some juice there... Then the two of us are going to the principal,” Komba told him. He had a job for me too: “Alien, you’re coming with us.”

“Ištenem, elektrika!” Evika screamed handing me chocolate pudding in a bowl made of cheap steel.

Principal Lalić’s office was charged with the energy of interchangeable love waves. Me and her, Komba and Vanja... It isn’t odd that the poor cook couldn’t survive in there, she was like a bird flying into an electric wire.

“I’m sorry, Mr Komar...” Krista began when Evika ran off. “But as you can see, I can’t help you even though I want to.”

She handled it like a professional.

She pulled out a huge pile of legal codes and bound documents. She read a few legal articles and paragraphs, justified them with numerous examples from practice taken out of a rich archive of newspaper articles...

“I must say, I exceptionally appreciate your noble and unselfish wish to help this young man begin a new life...”

Vanja was enjoying his pudding and awaiting the denouncement.

“And I don’t doubt that you would, despite your young age, sincerely take care of Vanja.”

“As if he were my own child, I swear!” Komba answered proudly. “I’ll prove it, send me the mentors and the committee...!”

“Settle down, Jesus, I believe you...” she calmed him. “Unfortunately, the law is clear and we must all abide by it. Therefore, Vanja stays under the jurisdiction of this institution until he turns eighteen.”

“But you can’t do that,” Komba was breaking down, his face wrinkled up. “Check again, there must be a way...”

“It’s enough, man,” I tried to pull him out of the office. “Don’t make the situation even worse.”

If I had only pulled him out on time, maybe their story would have had a different ending, I don’t know... We’ll never find out. Because, just at that moment, our warm-hearted pool guy, with the body of a grown man and the heart of a child, decided to drastically mature.

Vanja put the empty bowl down on the table, licked his lips and simply said: “I love him.”

She heard it right. My lovely Snow White, for a moment she looked like she was trapped in a glass case fighting for air... For a second, two, then she got it together.

“It’s wonderful to love someone,” she smiled awkwardly. “There’s nothing wrong about that.”

We were standing there, the three of us, waiting for her next move.

“Vanja be a good boy and leave me with these gentlemen alone.”

The boy slapped his thighs, nodded his head and left the room.

She was staring through the window, twirling a large golden bracelet around her wrist.

*Looks like Ned’s showing off again, jealousy was biting into me.*

“I’m going to get them to put speed bumps down there...” Krista said. “The traffic is getting worse and these idiots drive like crazy. A child could get hurt one day and then it will be too late. We have to prevent a tragedy before it happens.”

She was slowly moving away from the window and turning to Kombar.

“You see, Kombar, I wouldn’t want you to think I’m stuck up and conservative...”

“No, I don’t think you are,” Kombar jumped in. “I believe that you...”

“Please, let me finish...” she stopped him. “Life hardly ever follows our heart or passion... The wealth and stability of family and society usually make us follow completely different norms. Unfortunately, it’s just like that. We have to adjust.”

“You’re wrong, Mrs Principal,” I had an urge to butt in. “If we stomp on ourselves and our wishes, then we truly are real bastards.”

“Don’t judge so harshly, Bošković,” she said sitting back behind the table.

She opened a folder with our files and pulled out Kombar’s.

“As your behaviour has been representable up to now and you have less than a month to complete your civil service, I won’t file a report to the committee...”

“Oh, thanks,” Komba mumbled.

“I believe you are aware of the fact,” she went on. “That the severity of this case is more than enough for The Office of Defence to sentence you to military duty immediately.”

“Yes, I’m aware.”

“However, I’m forced to take action. The boy is in his vulnerable, adolescent years and it’s the duty of all of us to protect him. It would be best for Vanja if we were to transfer him to another surrounding, most probably the Home in Split. I’ll forward a proposal to Child Services today...”

“No, no you can’t...” Komba squealed.

“I can and I must. And if I find out that you *ever* set foot near that home and contacted that child, I will make sure they put you behind bars.”

“That won’t be necessary,” he replied harshly.

I didn’t like the calmness in his voice.

We headed to the door.

“Bošković, you stay, I need you for something.”

“Look at the horny...” Komba started.

“Shut it,” I pushed him out.

22.

I returned to the office. She was looking over the street.

“I didn’t have a choice,” she said without turning around.

“He’ll get over it.”

I moved closer to her, put my hands around her waist and stuck my nose in between her shoulder blades.

It was nice there.

Thousands of little creatures scuttling beneath her warm skin.

“Don’t...” she tried to move away.

“I will and what can you do about it? I’ll inhale your smell until my last breath.”

“Stop messing around, please.”

She turned around, she looked serious.

“It’s over, I know,” I said.

“My little smart cookie...” she smiled tiresomely.

I stepped away from her, playing cool and jumped onto the couch.

“He said he’d put us on the front page of the papers?!” I was grinning with my tongue hanging out. “And a free porno DVD for the readers?”

“He gave me divorce papers, two nights ago,” she said gloomily. “He gave me twenty-four hours to make up my mind.”

“What a humanitarian.”

“Last night I told him to tear up the papers. That I’d go to Boston with him...”

“And then, surprise, a new bracelet!”

“Why are you doing this to me?” she sighed.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean that. I can’t help it, I’m losing you...”

“You’re not losing anything silly... This, what we have, no one can take it away from us.”

“Yeah great! You’d be good doing commercials.”

“You’re not fair, honey...”

I closed my eyes.

“Many people go through their life without experiencing what you and I have had in the past seven months.”

“Do you remember the first day I hugged you?”

She came close and put her fingers through my hair.

“Your hands were shaking, and I heard every beat of your heart... I thought to myself, Oh Lord, give him strength...”

“You know, while I was holding you in my arms, it was... It was the first time in my life I felt needed...”

“I know... I knew that the moment I placed my cheek on your breast.”

“I’ll wait for you.”

“You’re my silly little boy... That’s why I adore you.”

“No, don’t make fun of me, I’ll...”

“I’m not, honey.”

“Your kids will grow up and leave and that dick-head won’t be able to black-mail you and you’ll get divorced. I’ll wait for you...”

“I’ll be an old granny. You won’t even want to look at me.”

“Close your eyes,” I told her.

She closed them, only her long black eyelashes showing. I kissed both her eyelids. My lips felt her tears fighting their way through.

“I’ll wait for you. Forever.” I hardly said it because of the lump in my throat.

She gently pushed me away and got out of my arms. She went to the door and for the first time, since we’ve been together, she decided to turn the key.

She came back, lifted her skirt and took her panties off.

Her little hump was red, freshly shaved, clean and irritated.

“Here...” she said quietly. “Am I your little girl now?”



I licked her and cried like a baby.

23.

The long wait for Maja's and Bart's wedding fell down to only three weeks.

I realised it was time even I went the wedding gift hunting. I was still pretty sure I would skip the wedding, I wouldn't show up at all, but I didn't want to be a complete asshole by not sending them a gift.

That's how I got stuck in a trendy shop that worships kitchenware. Porsche napkin holders, Jamie Oliver wine openers, pink marble placemats...

"Heeeey!" she was waving from the bar stool section designed by some famous Japanese designer.

Gloria, Gorana, Gonerila... What was her name?

I sort of knew her from Medži's circle.

"Hey, you, what a surprise!" she chirped and gave me a wink. "Let me guess... We're both here for the same reason?"

"Maybe."

"C'mon, dude, stop messing with me... She invited the whole town."

"Looks like it."

"You got an idea of what you're getting them, sweetheart?"

"Nope. You?"

"No, nothing, I'm already starting to panic, you know... Maja's wedding is just around the corner and I haven't found anything yet, nothing..." she kept going on while trying out all the bar stools.

She had long, fine legs, which were nicely riding those Japanese minimalistic chairs.

“This is all shit, what are they thinking, fuckers... This thing here, it’s totally out of fashion abroad... You know, I’m fucked up cause my week is packed with flights. When you think about it, I’m always out and about but I don’t get to do any shopping, we just spend a night somewhere and fly out in the morning...”

“There’s enough time...” I shrugged my shoulders. “Listen, I’m sick of this shopping business for today.”

“You won’t believe me, but so am I.”

“Let’s get something to drink, I’m paying.”

“No, drinks on me,” she said.

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“Be still, don’t moooove!”

She powered my stiff cock with cocaine, thoroughly from the balls to the head and shoved her warm, shaky nostrils into it.

She sniffed it all up.

The remains sprinkled through the air while her shaved pussy got to business. Succulently sliding up and down...

She’s special, I admit it... A flight attendant. Croatia Airlines. She said she always adjusts her work schedule - flights to Dubai, Qatar, whatever...

When we got to her place, she even put her uniform on quickly, just for me. She didn’t have to if you ask me. Their uniforms are hideous, I mean really...

Guys, it was my first time in a silicon valley. Pretty shit job. Her scars looked like someone used a stapler. Her right boob all lumpy. I heard they are doing cuts through the bellybutton these days. She probably hasn’t heard of this discovery.

Silly girl, she has this crazy, sexy body, tight androgynous hips, why did she have to install these unmoveable props... I don't even know if they are allowed that high. I mean, going up to 15 000 meters with those boobs...

“Slap meee!”

I slapped her.

A malfunction - I saw Krista in her. I'm such a bastard.

“Biaatchhh, tell me I'm your biaatch?!”

She continued:

“Fuck me, fuck meee!”

She stuffed her fingers down my throat.

I grabbed some coke off the table and rubbed it into our gums.

“Yeeees, my beautiful cooock!”

She got off and started riding my foot with her pussy.

“Give me your sperm, give it, give it to meee!” she was screaming, licking my foot, sucking my toes, riding them again, hitting my knees with her plastic props. “I'm all dry, moist me with your juices!”

I squirted sperm all over her face and lips (no plastic there, yet), pneumatic...

“Piss on me, piss on meee!”

That got me going.

She caught all the yellow drops and smeared them all over her body, she bathed in the yellow mist, she kissed me, her tongue sweet from all the flavours...

The stewardess was damn fine. A real bomb. But all for nothing, I kept thinking of Krista.

“You’re fucking with me?”

“Nope.”

“Jesus, Komba, you’ll end up behind bars.”

“Chill dude,” he bitted. “Better get us some more drinks. She ain’t gonna get them.”

Ian Curtis had the day off.

His replacement was a stoned chick with ugly black glasses, her hair orange in an afro style. She kept trying to stick the head of a pigeon statue back into place.

“You fat cow...” her tongue twisted. “You just had to be on that shelf, didn’t you.”

I walked up to the bar. She hardly noticed me.

“The boss is gonna kill me if I don’t fix you...”

She hit the ravaged bird on the head.

“Can I get another two?”

“Two of what?” she gave me a harsh look.

She had glue everywhere, even on her chin.

“Kilkenny’s.”

“Go get it yourself... See, this fucking bird is fucking with me...”

I went behind the bar, pulled the knob, titled the glasses, filled them and went back to Komba.

Thursday, noon, the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2005. Two days before Maja’s *I do*, ten days until we’re done with the Home.

“I hope you choke on it,” I commented rudely, while the thirsty ass relaxed and innocently gulped down his beer.

“Chill dude.”

“Yeah, chill, no reason for me to be pissed.”

“Of course, you’re pissed for no reason. You’re as boring as the news.”

“I don’t know how to stay calm after you just told me this bloody secret – you’re gonna fill the basement with bombs.”

“It’ll all be fine, you’ll see.”

“No, it will not, Komar.”

“Oh, look at him being all formal today!” he laughed and finished off the beer. “Geez, this beer is shit, gets warm quickly... I’m gonna get another round.”

He came back drenched.

“What’s funny?!” he yelled.

He put the drinks on the table. Pulled out a cigarette pack from his shirt pocket and threw them on the table with disgust. Water cigs.

“Mother fucking stone-head!”

“That’s your penance,” I chilled out a bit out. “If you’d moved your ass and gotten the drinks yourself...”

“Enough of you, smartypants,” he was also giggling. “Cut the crap.”

We shut up. We focused on Kilkenny.

In the meantime, the pigeon had lost a leg.

“You know what, you retarded goose...” the carrot head was fighting with the bird. “I’m not paid enough for fucking around fixing you... I don’t have to!”

Komba’s mind had wandered off to Vanja. He was circling the glass with his finger and gazing out the window,

“Maybe Marunić is right...”

“Fuck off,” he joined me quickly.

“No, really, maybe if you’d wait some time, have some patience... It’s only two more years. Vanja will turn eighteen and you can...”

“What the fuck can we do then?!” he started getting angry. “We’re getting outta here, man, you get it... We have no other choice!”

“Okay, well, what about... Your plan... Are you really gonna bluff it?”

“Do you really think I’m an idiot? That I really want to spend the rest of my life in prison?”

“I hope you’re not.”

“Of course, I’m gonna bluff it. I want them to shit their pants a bit. And leave me and Vanja alone. That’s all.”

“I’m worried about you, idiot...” I sighed.

“C’mon, man...” he hugged me. “When it’s all over, you’ll be my best man.”

25.

A red garter swayed over my nose.

I was laying straight over the table, my knees bent, drinking wine, holding the glass only with my lips.

That stewardess, Gloria, Gorana or Gonerila..., was working her hips over my face (she had a tight white satin dress on or a shirt, it’s hard to be precise) and dancing sensually... Somewhere around my ankles, I could feel Medži’s bare feet dancing wildly and rhythmically between plates. She sang as if her life depended on it.

I bent over, even more, pulled my head back. A good way to get cabernet in your ear.

From that upside-down perspective, I caught Vladimir watching me tensely. He was sitting at his table.

I got out of the stewardess’ dance and fell to the floor. I sat there some time in between the dancing feet and then heroically got to my feet.

Medži was already sitting next to Bart, drinking champagne out of the same glass and giving him cute kisses. Inside their world, Krasnodar was running around having troubles with his heavy camera objective that should be used for filming wildlife. After every shot, he got off his chair, showed the newlyweds the display and annoyed them till they commented. Bart and Medži nodded their heads repeatedly.

“If I remember well, you said you wouldn’t come,” Vladimir didn’t miss the chance to fuck with me.

“Well as you can see, I changed my mind.”

“A promise is a promise. Even if it includes hurting your sister.”

“Ok, now you’re really fucking with me...”

“No, it’s not okay,” he stopped me. “Next time, think before you speak.”

My mood was too good to start arguing with him. I sat next to him, threw some ice cubes in a glass and topped it with vodka.

Dad was just finishing off his wine.

“You drinking it straight?” I lifted the bottle and offered him some more.

“Half-half.”

“Not with this good wine.”

I ruined his pinot with mineral water.

“You’re not dancing?”

He put his hands in his pockets. The rosemary branch on his collar swayed.

“No. You’re doing enough table-dancing for the both of us.”

I wanted to remind him that his daughter had had quite a fancy table dance choreography, but I didn’t.

“Shame on you,” he went on. “In front of all these people. *Important* people. First, you’re late now you’re acting up.”

*Acting up, fuck...*, what am I, 12.

“Best maaan!”

Bart’s best man threw his arms around me. He had no shirt on and his Kenzo pants were unzipped. He smothered my forehead and cheeks with kisses. He had a profitable marketing agency. And quite a few betting windows. On the side.

“Let’s dance!” he yelled and threw his glass on the floor.

He danced away.

I poured myself more vodka.

“You’re bleeding!” Vladimir surprised me.

“What, where...?”

“Your forehead...”

A piece of the best man’s glass must have got me after it shattered to the ground. I didn’t even feel it. I touched my forehead. Some blood was on my fingers. I sucked it and smiled.

“It’s nothing... Just a scratch.”

“Bloody scratch, you can get tetanus!”

From the front pocket of his suit jacket he got out an ironed handkerchief, quickly scanned the sterile state of it and poured some vodka on it. He moved closer to me and pressed the handkerchief on my forehead.

“Mother-fuck...” I squealed.

“Just a scratch, you say...” he grinned a little. “Don’t move, it’ll stop shortly.”

Vodka was dripping off my forehead, Vladimir’s hand, on this improvised bandage, was as warm as it was harsh. At that moment we seemed very close...

“Look at the fucker, slacking off!”



Colonel Rašić. He was drunk, swaying and gesticulating with a glass in his hands. He was all wet, sweat was dripping from his cholesterol filled body. He looked like a monster that had just dived out of a lake.

“And so many sexy gals in the room...” he stumbled over the table and laughed.

“He had a little accident, Colonel,” Vladimir explained, keeping his hand on my forehead. “It’s nothing, he’s young...”

“What’s with the cuddling, Bošković?” he murmured, spitting on us. “Let him fly over to his old MILF, he’ll get better immediately!”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, Colonel...” Vladimir grinned in confusion.

You get it, he had to react to King Kong’s joke, laugh with him, even though he had no idea what he was farting about.

“It’s OK Dad,” I moved his hand off my forehead and got up. “I’m off.”

“Hurry up, boy, there she is rubbing her pussy, anxiously!”

“Oh, that, you got a new girl waiting!” Vladimir acted interested. “That is quite usual at their age, Colonel... One today, a new one tomorrow...”

“She’s not a girl, Bošković, fuck, what are u blind?!”

I stood in front of him and got into his sweaty pig face: “If you don’t shut it, I’ll cut out your tongue!”

“Alen, you’re not allowed to speak to the Colonel like that!” Vladimir was shocked.

“You’ve raised your son well, Bošković, great job...” he burped. “Firstly, he’s spitting on the Croatian uniform and secondly, he’s fucking that bitch in front of all those innocent children...”

“Fucking who?” Vladimir tried to act uninterested.

“Fucking who? The boy’s bagging his boss...” Rašić giggled. “How do you say it – the conscience man, huh?”

“You, you... again...” he stammered towards me, his anger choking him.

“Go fuck yourself!” I nicely said to the Colonel and headed to the toilet.

“Dear newlyweds, dear parents, all our quests...!” the lead singer Morana said on stage where the band was playing. “Now, a song... The song our deceased president, the Father of our Nation, adored: ‘*Ja se konja bojim*!’”

“Let’s go Bošković we’re not at a funeral, bloody hell!” Rašić yelled behind my back.

21.20

*Ihaaa! My nose is gonna explode... What the fuck are you faggots putting in these drugs, fucking chilli powder... Jesus, we’re not Indian! Don’t worry Medži, I’m great... You’ll see, come here near the toilet, don’t miss it... You’ll see how your bro’s got his shit together. Halloween, man, a huge bloody scar on my forehead, my right nostril as large as a strawberry, juice dripping... The bear is picking strawberries it goes something like that... I’m sorry Medži, I was trying not to look at you... You know, so I couldn’t see what you were saying while I was yelling at the Colonel... Well, who gives two fucks anyway! Don’t worry, half the crowd is already drunk, believe me, they didn’t hear or see anything and the party is going good... You know, fuck me dead, you really are the most beautiful bride in history... Look, I see Bart peering. Good old Bart. I’m coming, Bart, I’m on my way, I’m waving, nah, I’m good... And he’s gone. Don’t send him anymore, darling, please, I’m coming... Oops, fucking sink...*

26.

She caught me coming out of the toilet.

“Have you finally got yourself together?!”

“As you can see...” I said and kissed her on the top of her nose.

“Look, party breaker... Do me a favour and settle your hormones. That’s all you have to do for me today. Okay?”

“It’s a deal.”

“And wipe your nose.”

I wiped it with my sleeve.

“Yeah, great...”

“Ladies turn!” Morana said from the dance floor.

“C’ mon genius, let’s see your moves!” Medži took my hand.

But her plans were interrupted by Krista.

She came out of nowhere. More beautiful than ever. In a long, shiny, silver dress with a large v-cut on the back.

“Dear Maja, I’m sure you won’t mind if I steal your brother for a bit.”

“Nope. I’ll lend him for a dance,” Medži said and tapped me on the arse. “Just, please, bring him back on his feet.”

“Don’t worry,” Krista smiled and winked charmingly. “Nothing will happen to him while he’s under my watch.”

And that’s how the two of us started twirling between the other couples.

The band was playing some slow Mexican song. Morana was singing enthusiastically. Like a born Cucaracha.

Krista’s body was warm and smelt divine. I was shaking like a teenager.

“You’re beautiful...” I hardly got it out.

“Watch your steps,” she was messing with me.

“Only eight more days...” I lost my voice.

“Eight whole days, my love,” she whispered and gently moved her fingers down my spine. “Let’s not let anything ruin them, please...”

“Did you see what that dickhead did?”

“Yes. I couldn’t hear you, but I knew that you were defending me... I read it on your face. My sweetheart...”

I pulled her towards me.

I was slowly diving my head into her neck, inhaling her soft skin and touching her with my lips... I was getting lost within her, her shoulder my last horizon. I didn’t give a fuck about anyone there...

However, Nenad Lalić did give a fuck. A fuck about everyone there.

We didn’t notice when the other couples slowed down and stopped. Nor when the band silenced and Morana lost her voice. The worst part is that we didn’t even notice Ned. All until he snuck up between us and angrily growled, only for our ears to hear:

“Dear, newlyweds, if you’re planning on fucking on this stage, I have nothing against it. But, it would be fair for me to put it on the front page tomorrow... So our kids can see their mommy at her best...”

I stepped back and called over the cameraman: “Krasnodar, come!”

Poor Krasnodar came over quickly, but not quick enough to catch my uncontrolled fist hitting his master. I smacked the shit out of Nenad’s smiley face. The hardest I could.

“Alen, don’t...!” Krista screamed, but too late.

He flew over all the way to Morana and dropped to the ground like a bag of shit.

Morana was still holding onto the microphone, her jaw hanging to the floor.

He spat out some blood. It stained his Armani tuxedo.

Krista’s wifely instinct made her conclude he needed help.

“Get away from me...” he pushed her away in anger while she was trying to help him up.

He somehow got up on all fours.

“You piece of shit...” he fell on his ass again and stared at me, moaning. “You’re gonna pay for this...”

Vladimir, of course, also had an idea of me paying for something. He pushed through the shocked wedding guests and stood next to me. His lips were red with anger.

“Get out,” he said, hardly raising his voice.

“What?!”

“Out...” he repeated, hissing.

“Wait a minute, you can’t do that...” I was ready to surrender.

“You make me sick. But you’re not going to anymore.”

“C’mon boys,” Medži ignored the tension and started pushing us towards the frozen band. “You’re ruining my party. Let’s go...Which song will I request?”

“Give it up Maja,” Vladimir stopped her. “Alen is on his way out.”

“Okay Dad,” I sighed and gave him a sour grin. “And please, when midnight comes, dance with the bride for me...”

I bit my lip, trying to suppress my tears, pulled a Clint Eastwood face and swayed out to the exit.

“Son, wait,” Mum came up to me. “I’ll take you home!”

“You don’t have to he’s not a child...” Vladimir opposed.

But Bokica didn’t care.

“I have to. He’s had too much to drink.”

Weirdly, Dad didn’t stop her. He must have already wasted his bonus points on something else.

“Bro, stop.”

Bart caught up to us in the lobby. He was carrying a half-empty bottle of Dom Perignon.

“One for the road?”

“Ok, man,” I took the bottle and finished it off.

“You nearly left without desert,” he gave me a plastic box with a piece of wedding cake.

His eyes were fixated. Above those pumped rabbit lips and plastic cheeks. “Thanks, Bart...”

“Take care, my man.”

27.

She turned into the driveway, passed the boxwood fence and pulled up to the garage. She turned off the car.

“Here we are,” she said. “I’m surprised that there’s hardly any traffic at this time... I mean, it’s Saturday and not even that late. Weird, isn’t it?”

I unbuckled my seat belt.

“Goodnight, Ma.”

“He didn’t mean anything bad.”

“I don’t give a shit.”

“Don’t be like that. Dad only wants the best for you. The best for all of us.”

“Oh yes, his little show before was full of love.”

“You’re wrong, and please, try to understand him. He really wanted Maja’s wedding to go as planned and he spent a lot of time organising everything. That’s probably why he was so tense lately...”

“All good, Mum, I’m tired...” I opened the door and put one foot out. “Go on, go back, so he doesn’t make another scene...”

I got out of the Golf. Vladimir got a new one last year. It only had 10 000 k’s on it.

“Wait, I’d like to show you something!”

“I’m really tired. Bokica, really...”

“It’s important, trust me!”

She didn’t care about my resistance. She quickly got out of the car and ran to the front door.

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“Geez, Ma, what are we doing here. You’re starting to annoy me...”

When we walked in, she pushed me straight into Vladimir’s study. She started going through the stuff on his desk.

“Aha, here it is!” she screeched and pulled out a notebook, a hardback with orange covers and placed it on the table.

“Dear God, I haven’t touched it in ages...”

Her fingers went over the label in the middle of the notebook, pressing down on the tacky covers.

“Read this, please. You might understand your father a bit more. It isn’t easy for him, after everything he’s been through...”

## THE FLOWER SHOP

Was written, in big capital letters on the label.

My brother was a true Alan Ford fan. That was his notebook. Viktor’s. There was a sticker of the guys from TNT on the back cover.

“He kept a diary... During those days...” she said stuttering, while sadness shaded her eyes. My dear little boy.”

I nervously went through the pages, the pages full of Viktor’s thick and dense handwriting.

“Well, why didn’t you show me this ever before?”

“I hoped I wouldn’t have to.”

“Maja’s probably read it,” I added meanly.

“She hasn’t.”

“How come you changed your mind tonight?”

“Because of you and your father. I can’t watch you argue anymore. You’re both breaking my heart, son...”

“And this is some kind of alternative therapy?”

“I hope so.”

“Bullshit.”

“Why are you like that?”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m going back.”

“It’s time. He’s probably had kittens.”

I walked her to the car. It was a quiet night. The air smelt nice. Nobody to be seen.

“Dear God, what a wonderful evening...” she inhaled a deep lungful breath of air.

“Yeah. Now, have mercy and drive.”

“Please read the diary carefully... And don’t judge him too harshly.”

“I don’t get it, why would I judge Viktor?”

“Vladimir.”

“Oh, that’s something else. I believe I always will.”

“Don’t, these things aren’t to be joked about. Not even when you don’t mean it... Sometimes a man is forced to do things which haunt him his whole life...”

“It’s too late Mum. I’m not in the mood to go into the philosophy of Dad’s epic life...”

“He’s carrying a great burden, Alen...”



“I can see that. As if it’s stuck to his arse.”

“Help him, I beg you.”

“Geez, OK, get going...” I kissed her forehead and escorted her into the car.

But she didn’t turn the key. Not yet.

“Do just one more thing for me, son.”

“What now?”

“When you go to bed, leave your bedside lamp on...You know, so when we come home tonight... So I see that you’re still there...”

I bent over and put my hand on her shoulder. She was smiling but I felt a weird chill under my hand.

“Are you cold?”

“No. Why?”

“Nothing...” I got up and threw another joke at her. “You know Ma, don’t forget to tuck me in when you get home...”

“You think I won’t?”

She rushed away.

To the father-daughter dance.

28.

I occupied the couch in the lounge room.

But first I got rid of the ironed tablecloths. Bokica put them all over the furniture. I didn’t want to be disturbed while reading. I lit a cigarette and to a cautious sip of hot coffee. I was ready. Hyped up, I was entering the mysteries of Viktor’s diary.

He didn’t use dates. He only noted the day in the week, the space – interior, exterior, and day or night – just like in the movies.

After a few pages, I thought Mum had mixed up his diaries and given me the wrong one. She dramatically described his war records, but the beginning of this one was quite the opposite, like it promised a good show.

(SATURDAY. INT. DAY)

It's raining like it's Judgement Day.

Under a map of Croatia covered in different coloured arrows, Captain Dad is doing a crossword and drinking tea. I'm having a mad time. I'm throwing a rubber ball at bulletproof vests that are folded in the corner. Zdenko, called Horsey, is asleep on a small hunter's chair. He claims that he got his nickname from the kids at school because his thing was as big as a horse's. However, the guys from the line make fun of him saying its cause of his buck teeth. Zdenko is Colonel Rašić orderly...

By the way, what the fuck does he mean by orderly? It doesn't matter... He continues:

I can observe Captain Dad's eyes drooping. Anyway, I'm still shooting at the vests. Slam! The door opens and a lady, a Scila and Garibda mish-mash tumbles into our basement, imagine Scila and Garibda as one person! A big one, half a ton at least, in a long, wool, lilac kaftan with a thick layer of face powder and bushy fake eyelashes.

"Is my baby hereee?!" Miss Piggy squealed.

The squeal which sounded like a herd of elephants stomping in made Dad and Zdenko hysterically jump. Convinced that, at the least, the enemy had staged a nuclear attack, they pulled out their guns. "Excuse meee?! You're pointing your guns at me?!" she screamed like an opera singer. "How dare yooooou?! Just you wait, bastards, till my baby hears this!" she dug her feet in front of Captain Dad and flapped her hands like a bird. "Where is heee, take

me to him!” Dad got his shit together. He tried to find out what planet she had fallen from: “Dear Mam, first I ask for an explanation on how you got by the guards at the entrance, and second, what are you doing in Colonel Rašić’s quarters?” Miss Piggy exploded: “Firstly, I brought in two trucks of sanitary material, and secondly, dick-face if you are fond of your little balls, tell my baby I’m here!” She didn’t even wait for Dad to get up, she already started knocking on the Colonel’s door. However, the worthy orderly...

Here he goes again with the orderly?!

... The worthy orderly Zdenko jumps up and heroically spread his arms across the door. “No can do, the Colonel strictly forbid us to disturb him!” he acclaims. “Silencee, you little wimp!” Miss Piggy grunted and punched the shit out of him. Poor Zdenko fell to the floor. A fine knockout. She started barging towards Colonel’s chambers...

Imagine that fucker. I can actually imagine Viktor losing his shit by trying not to burst into laughter. But, let’s continue with his confessions in this dear diary:

After half an hour of unambiguous sounds from the room the door opened. Clod 1, a.k.a Colonel Jozić Rašić comes out with Clod 2, obviously, Miss Piggy, under his arms (a bit puffed and without her fake eyelashes) and says:

“Gentlemen, let me introduce my dear childhood friend, a big patriot, Madam Dora Nađ! Let’s give madam Nađ a round of applause, who has, defying the danger, not wasting a minute, arrived at the first battle line and with that brought a worthy donation for our soldiers!” We clapped. The she-man removed herself from her satellite and gracefully shook Captain Dad’s hand, whacked Zdenko on his swollen nose and waved her ruffled kaftan

sleeves above me and said: “And you, messenger boy, do you have any special wishes, just tell me, honey...”

I told her my wish: “Gift me with your dress. You know, there’s always a lack of tents in the brigade!”

I’m gonna piss my pants. If only I could have seen Miss Piggy’s face while her makeup was crackling up in rage. Or Daddy looking for the strongest hook to hang himself.

Paper, paper... I concentrated on Viktor’s testament. I had read quite a bit but still hadn’t got to any part to help me understand Vladimir’s pain. But this was loads of fun. Listen to this:

(TUESDAY. INT. NIGHT)

Rick and Hank are in the quarters. “Good slivotccc,” Hank’s breaking his tongue, drinking his fifth *šljivovica*. “Yeah!” his friend Rick agrees. They are freelancers from The Netherlands. They’re writing a coverage about the war in Croatia. Rašo was the first to give them a monologue about our fight for freedom. “It looks like Mr Reporter is bored,” Colonel observed poignantly, catching Rick’s yawn. I translated it to Hank and he kicked Rick in the head with his Doc Martens. “And now, Zdenko, feel free to serve us some food,” Rašo ordered. “A man gets hungry even during a war, right, bloody oath...” So Zdenko made us a platter of food. A few kilos of Italian prosciutto. Aware of the reporters, Colonel took off his singlet and opened a carton of Martel. “French...” Rašo winked at me. “Translate that to the gentlemen, let them know that they’re not in the Balkans.” Rick and Hank weren’t impressed with the Colonel’s cognac stash, but started whispering and then Hank left the basement and went up to their car. He came back armed with two crates of Heineken. A pleasant surprise. Rick started handing over cans. They made a lovely rustle and foamed up. Then at once, Rašo

jumped up as if lightning had hit his fat face and yelled: “This is communist garbage!!” Pointing his finger at the Heineken making the can look even greener. Rick and Hank weren’t catching on, they probably thought it’s how we get excited when we get good booze. I stopped translating, of course. “You slimy spies, what are they trying to make us drink?!” Rašo yelled. “Look at the star, look how big it is!” “It’s not, colonel, it’s just a normal star...” Zdenko even knew. “That’s on Dutch beer, how do you call it, it’s their logo... There’s no connection to communism.” Rašo nodded his head suspiciously: “Well, I’m never that sure, bloody hell, there are many communists here, a man has to be cautious... Cheers!”

You can’t blame him. Colonel Rašić was a referent in the municipality office for Community Defense before the Homeland war. Fifth in line.

And he’s a general... My Dad talks about him as if he’s Napoleon!

29.

I first thought this was all for shit, like a Monty Python-style diary:

(FRIDAY. INT. NIGHT)

We’re chilling in the basement. Snow and ice outside. Two weeks till Christmas. The heating is on max. Wearing only singlets and pants. Eating barbeque. The guy at the stadium does a good job. They didn’t recruit him so he cooks for the army for free. We’re watching porn on a VHS. “Uh, that’s a black one!” Rašo’s cheering him on. His had about 40 *čevapi* with onions. “My little small hole, it’s gonna come out your throat, I’m telling you!” the Colonel predicted. The girl is really small. Dad is pretending to read Clausewitz but checking the screen every few seconds. The phone rings. Secret line. It’s meant to be a secret line, even though the Chetniks keep cutting in and swearing their heads off at us. But we do the same to

them. It wasn't the Chetniks but Zdenko. "Zdenko, where the hell are you?!" the Colonel answered. "At what fucking post, you idiot, do you know how many posts are in our brigade?!" Rašo is getting agitated 'cause he's missing out on the sweetest scenes of the hardcore sex. "At Babin Dvor?! What are you doing there, mother fucker?! As if I don't know, you guys are messing around, pig on the spit, huh... C'mon, stop fucking with me and listen... Is someone with you? Ok. Get a few more of those lazy arses, and cut down some of those ferns that have sprouted out. As if you're in a swamp, not the fucking army...! With what, are you really asking me that?! With axes, kinder fucking surprises, hurricanes, I don't give a fuck?! Just get rid of them, so they're not there when I come to check on you guys, is that clear?!" He smashed the phone down. "He'd keep talking till tomorrow... What did I miss?! Kid, rewind it a bit..."

We watched the third movie in peace. Then, again, the phone. The top-secret line. "What now?!" Rašo yelled and slapped himself on the forehead. "Have you gotten rid of them already?!... You haven't, you say? A few left?! You lazy bastards, I'll shoot you all! Each and every one of you! And what the fuck are you waiting for now? Stack up what you have and bring it over here!" he was screaming, and then he listened for a bit. "Whaaat?! You're not sure...?! I'm not getting you...The lines were breaking so you what... Ferns, you idiot, fuck me dead... Of course, I said ferns!" The Colonel cut the line, looked at us and fatuously grinned. "Ha, the idiots... I nicely said ferns, but he heard Serbs..." Dad put down Clausewitz, tried to smile and stuttered: "That's... that's some sort of joke, right, Colonel?"

Here I stopped reading. I still thought it was some black humour, Monty Python shit. Viktor had a great mind for black humour. I was confident that some break was waiting on the next page, that dumb Zdenko would come back and say that everything was fine, that the ferns were chopped up and the land cleared... But he didn't.

“Joke, my ass?” Rašić frenzied. “Get your boots on Bošković, we’re heading out. The guys have fucked up big time. Yeah, we’ve got some fucked up shit to clean up...” Horror was beaming out of Dad’s eyes. Acid burst through my stomach... My legs went ice cold, froze... “Viktor, lie down...” Dad said, his lips fixated. “Don’t wait for us. We’ll be in late...” Rašo butted in: “No way in hell? Lying down? The boy’s coming with us. A man’s strength comes from cleaning up shit not from sleeping in a warm bed...” While putting his jacket on he took the normal phone. “Get me the boss... Wake him up, it’s urgent...” he said and waited on the line. “I am...” he moaned when he heard the voice of the groggy boss. “Yeah, fucking great, boss... My guys got drunk, fucked up, sort of got rid of some enemy civilians. Fuck it, they’ve been tense these days, nearly Christmas, you know...” he stopped and carefully listened to the boss’s question. “It’s not in town, it’s in Babin Dvor... Yeah, a Chetnik village. That’s it. Nah, mostly oldies, the young joined the Chetniks, of course...” He listened to the voice on the line then continued: “Yeah, I know, you don’t have to remind me. They were all armed, boss, they keep guns and swords under their beds. Well, I’m afraid they killed... How many? I don’t know, maybe twenty, twenty-five, that’s how many were left in the village. Yeah, they’re really strong, boss...” Dad hugged me in despair. His hands were drenched in warm sweat but ice-cold. We were both shaking as if it was minus forty in the room. “Okay, okay...” he nodded. “We’ll handle it... Fuck, it is what it is, we can’t go back now. Don’t you worry boss...” he got up, listening to the last orders, and zipped his jacket up to his neck. “Of course I will punish them, we’re in the bloody army, aren’t we! No one’s going home, they’ll be on post for a month, you’ll see them then.”

It felt like a freaky force was sucking the blood from my body. My fingers went numb, I could barely turn the pages...

(FRIDAY. EXT. NIGHT)

“Bloody hell, Colonel, what happened there, that’s a crime...” Dad yelled in his seat next to Rašić while the jeep took us to Babin Dvor, its beams off. “We must inform the authorities. At once...” “Get your shit together Bošković, it isn’t a crime if you’re at war and you’re killing your enemies.” “But, those were civilians...” Dad insisted. “What fucking civilians?!” Colonel yelled and flashed the beams for a moment. “We’re at war, this is the first line and, in case you’ve forgotten, here, there’s no difference between soldiers and civilians...” He went on in a somewhat lighter tone. “We’re at war, Bošković, accidents happen. The guys got lost for a second; we must consider that. Now, we won’t let this one incident shame our righteous fight for freedom... Traitors are just waiting for it, to betray our proud Croatian nation, and you’re not one of them, are you, Bošković?” “I don’t know... I, this is hard for me to...” Dad was gasping for air. “C’mon now, let’s be smart – Major...,” he emphasized the last word and turned the beams off.

My brain was sending me signals, it wasn’t too late to rip up and burn the damn FLOWER SHOP, never to find out how it ends...

(FRIDAY. EXT. NIGHT)

The moonlight was breaking through the clouds. It was as if silver had poured over the icy roof-tops and the snow-covered trees. The village looked like something out of one of Hans Christian Andersen’s stories...

“It’s the damn phone lines, Colonel, I swear to God!” Zdenko ran up to us wiping his hands into a bloody apron. “Fuck me dead if I heard what I was supposed to...!”



“It’s okay, Zdenko, calm down, it is what it is,” Rašić shut him up.

A group of soldiers, fighting and yelling, were pulling bodies out of a lit basement and chucking them onto a pile. “Fucking hell, and how I’m supposed to light a fucking cigarette now. How?!” A stocky-crooked-legged soldier swore. He was trying to get a cigarette out with his blood stuck fingers and it wasn’t going well. “Yeah, why not, fucker, take a break and let me do all the work here,” another one got agitated. “I’m gonna get me a hernia, just like that!” He groaned while pulling out a naked corpse, a fat old man, his fits chopped off.

Suddenly, I felt I was losing my breath; I stumbled, fell to my knees and started balling my eyes out. Dad was holding my forehead. “What’s with the cuddling, Bošković?! Let him be, let’s see if he’s a man or not!” Rašić yelled and pulled Zdenko aside. He gave him his orders. He then came back to us. Dad helped me get to my feet. I felt like mallets were smashing against my temples. “And what did I tell you Bošković?!” Rašić grinned. “We’re lucky Zdenko heard the orders wrong, very lucky... We’re so lucky this little incident happened. In this group of civilians, as *you* call them, traitors were hidden! It’s true, isn’t it Zdenko?!” “Yes, sir Colonel!” Zdenko confirmed. He and a few other soldiers were bringing saws and axes and placing them next to the bodies of the old villagers. “As Zdenko here said...” Rašić went on, trying to justify their actions. “In the basement of the largest house in the village, see that one, well it was once over there...” he grinned, pointing at what was left of the house. “Well, there they’d found a large stock of ammunition and guns, big enough to supply a whole brigade... And they didn’t hesitate, but rather spontaneously, prepared for battle under all circumstances, disabled the enemy in completing their mission...”

“Careful with that saw, you idiot, you almost got my leg!” A scream was heard from somewhere near the pile of bodies. “Easy guys, someone could get hurt,” Colonel settled them down.

(FRIDAY. INT. NIGHT)

I curled up on a bench in the kitchen. They’d left me there. The massive oak bench stretched around three sides of the table. The table was covered with a white tablecloth embroidered with gold firs. Two plates, two glasses, cutlery for two. A whole *burek* in the pan. An icon of a saint placed in a silver vigil lamp on the wall. The shelf above the bench was stacked with thick, old books and recipes. There was also a framed photo, in colour, of a pretty old lady in a white apron, surrounded with pots of *kajmak*, wooden spoons and cheese wrapped in draining sheets... Next to it there was another photograph, black and white: a handsome boy, smiling, in a uniform. It had a message “Greetings to grandma Danojla from Tito’s soldier.” Who knew where that soldier was now?

“Look at you, you little cry-baby!” Rašić barged into the kitchen. “Are you a pussy or a Croatian soldier, for fuck’s sake?!” He was mocking me. Dad was dragging along behind him. He avoided eye contact. “Have you had a bit of this feast?” Colonel asked, digging his fingers into the *burek*.

I didn’t reply. I just pulled the blanket tighter around me.

“You haven’t? What a mistake, son, what a mistake... If these Chetnik hags know anything, it’s how to make a good *burek*...”

Dad sat on the bench and pulled me towards him.

“Your son’s gone a bit deaf and dumb, huh, Bošković, what have you to say about that?”

“You must understand, Colonel, this is a huge shock for a child.”

“What do you mean, what fucking shock, let him know what war is... War isn't, how do you say it... a box of chocolates, Jesus Christ!”

Colonel then noticed the photo of the young soldier. He took the photo off the shelf and observed it from all sides as if looking for a hidden code or something. Then he had an idea: “Bošković, go get Zdenko and see if they're done with Danojla. If not, bring her over, I have a couple of questions for her.”

Dad left. I lowered my head and slid deeper into the blanket like a worm. I heard Rašić ravenously swallowing huge mouthfuls of *burek*. I had to gather all my strength to keep my stomach in place. The door opened. Dad walked in first, then Zdenko. “Let's go, what are you waiting for?!” Zdenko was hurrying someone along. Another two soldiers walked in. One was that stocky-crooked-legged guy. The other one had black, messy hair and dark bags under his eyes. They were dragging two old ladies tied up with wire, their eyes bulgy and blurred with the fear of death.

“We had to bring them both, Colonel,” Dad briefed him. “They cried and begged to be kept together. I thought, maybe there's a reason...”

“Careful your brain doesn't explode from all the thinking, Bošković,” Colonel cut him short, moving his interest to Danojla, the old woman from the photo. They pushed her in front of him.

“Have mercy, mister, God give you strength,” the poor woman cried.

“Stop your wailing, fuck, I haven't touched you yet! Now, Danojla, tell me, who's this hag you can't even take a piss without?”

“My husband's brother's wife, Saveta is the name, mister...” she panickily cried. “She's all I've got in this world, and I'm everything to her... My man was killed last night by the justice of God and Saveta's too...”

“Wait, slow the fuck down... Husband’s brother’s what? What fucking justice? Whose?! What is she talking about?”

“Her sister-in-law...” Zdenko figured out. “I think that’s what she means, or something like it. A relative of sorts.” Rašić gave him a long look “Would you look at that, he knows the language of the Chetniks... Enough of this crap, we’ve got work to do here.” He grabbed the photo and waved it in front of Danojla’s face: “Spit it out you old hag, where’s your grandson?”

“Don’t know, mister, he hasn’t called in over three months now, the apple of his nana’s eye, the young forget...”

Rašić grabbed her by the shoulders and gave her a good shake: “I’ll tell you where he is, you fucking Chetnik bitch?! He’s shooting at *us*, burning our sacred Croatian land!”

“He’s not, mister, no, I swear to God!” grandma screamed. “He’s been in Canada for years, and my daughter and son-in-law...”

“You lying whore, you’ll be singing a different song soon, you fucking bitch,” Rašić growled and gave Zdenko the sign. He whispered a few words after which Zdenko signalled the other two and they left the house in a hurry.

I felt a throbbing pulse in my throat. I felt I could melt paper with my sweaty fingers as if I had dipped them into burning oil. I panicked while thinking of what was about to happen.

“Colonel, I must object,” Dad intervened. “The International Law says...” Rašić gave him an angry look, lifted his right index finger and stabbed it into his chest: “Listen, fucker, don’t you ever tell me what’s right and what’s wrong...”

Soon Zdenko’s three guys barged in. They were carrying a field telephone, a reel of wire and two truck batteries.

“Hand it over here, guys!” Rašić said. “Help granny give her grandson a long-distance call.”

Stocky and Blackie grabbed grandma Danojla, Saveta yelped desperately: “Don’t, I beg you, do not sin, dooo nooot!”

“Look at her, so anxious. Why didn’t you say you wanted to call Canada too... C’mon now, Jozić isn’t a cheap arse... C’mon guys, help her out!”

Stocky and Blackie threw Saveta onto the table. The poor woman was letting out horrible cries. Blackie lifted her skirt and tore off her panties. Stocky jumped on the table and sat on her back. Zdenko filled a pitcher with water and spilt it over her limbs.

“Major, grab the phone,” Colonel said. Dad hesitated. “That’s an order, Major!” Rašić yelled.

Dad cut off a long piece of wire from the reel and skinned the tips off both ends. He attached one side to the phone and brought the other to the table.

“Go, Zdenko, wire the bitch up,” Rašić ordered. Zdenko stuffed the wire deep into Saveta’s butt cheeks. “Careful she doesn’t fart, fucker!” Blackie said while Colonel waved at Dad: “Connect us to Canada, Major!”

Dad turned the handle. Saveta’s soul screamed with agony. Danojla just stood there, shivering. Her face was melting away in a puddle of tears. “Faster, Major!” Rašić urged him on. I felt her screams tearing through my lungs. I started screaming and clutched down on the floor next to Dad. “Dad, don’t, Dad, don’t do it!!”

Rašić grabbed me by the neck: “Hey, kid, no dilly-dallying when you’re with me! Look at her, you spoilt little shit!”

Dad was turning the handle intensely; the poor lady was twitching and howling. “Stoop, Dad, stop...” I was losing my breath, biting my fingers, trying to silence the pain.

Rašić pulled out his gun, raised the cock and placed it on the table: “C’mon you little pussy, save the old hag if you care so much!”

Saveta’s cries suddenly stopped. “What’s wrong granny, connection lost?!” Rašić laughed. “Ah, mother fucking Canadians!” The poor woman wasn’t moving. Stocky jumped off the table, stared into her face and concluded: “I guess her minutes expired, Colonel.”

“Weak heart,” Zdenko added.

Danojla fell to her knees, fisting her chest and opening her mouth in silent prayer. Rašić came to her with a wicked smile. “What’s with your mouth, you thirsty, huh?” He nodded at Zdenko. Zdenko opened the first, then the second battery and poured their consistency into a pitcher.

“Ok then, bitch, where’s your grandson?”

“I... I don’t know, mister, I swear on my family.”

“Ok, take a sip, it’ll help you remember,” Rašić laughed. “Zdenko, water the bitch...”

Danojla gasped and jumped to her feet thinking she could run away. Stocky and Blackie took a firm hold of her and Zdenko pressed the top of the pitcher to her paper-white lips. Saveta’s cries were a wonderful melody compared to the sound the battery acid produced in Danojla’s throat.

Dad turned to stone. “Nooooo!!!” I screamed and pushed my head hard into my palms hoping it would explode. “Stop, let her go!”

“Shoot! Save the old hag, if you’ve got the balls!” Rašić kept shouting.

The pitcher was nearly empty. “Let her go!” I begged and ran around the kitchen, crashing into walls. “Shoot, you pussy!” The Colonel was laughing. “Stoooooop!” I was screaming, the sound echoing as if I were in a tunnel. I suddenly felt the gun in my hand. Danojla’s distorted face was coming closer... I pulled the trigger, her head exploded... Everything stopped. Silence...

(SATURDAY. EXT. NIGHT)

Captain Dad is watching over the load-on. Blackie lifted the tarpaulin off the parked army truck and climbed on top. The soldiers are like ants. One group is stuffing the chopped up bodies into black bags. The others are wheeling over plastic barrels. All the barrels they could find. The smell of dried-up blood spread through the air. The packed bags are put into the barrels then up into the truck.

“Something smells tasty, boys, what we having today?!”

They were giggling like little girls.

“Zdenko, do mind hurrying it up?!” Rašić screamed impatiently. “Bloody hell, you don’t have to be that careful, it’s not nuclear waste!”

“Done, Colonel!” Zdenko declared.

“You, my newly assigned major, you’re going on a mission,” Rašić ordered open-mouthed Dad. “Get in the jeep, you’re following the truck. Here’s an envelope with the secret location, that’s where you’re gonna get rid of the ‘nuclear waste’, but do not open it before you pass Karlovac.” He came up to me and grinned: “Don’t you worry about this little fighter. I’ll look after him as if he’s mine. And you, Bošković, come back as quickly as you can...”

(WEDNESDAY. INT. NIGHT)

I’m not even gonna try to fall asleep tonight. I’m up for night duty soon. I will be at peace in 2 hours... But what will I do when I get back? Danojla came to me again last night. I hoped she wouldn’t come back. She hasn’t visited in a week. Like always, she was sitting in the kitchen, in her white apron, smiling. She was opening one of her big, messy recipe books and reading. She didn’t need her glasses. Seems like she found the recipe she was looking for, she

nodded and lifted her head... but from the corners of her burnt lips, blood is dripping. She quickly looked for something through the pocket of her apron, she pulled out chunks of *burek* and tried to stop the blood. She kept bleeding more and more, blood drops stained the table... I can't do this anymore. I don't have to go through this. I'm sorry Ma... Don't cry for me too much... Please. I'll be good after this. I just have to make it through. So my hands don't shake. You know, I'm scared to put the gun in my mouth, really scared... But I just want to sleep. Without them, the armless people... If I could just have one good sleep, Ma, I'd be better right away... I'm sorry. Here, they are coming for me. Luckily, I cleaned my gun yesterday. Take care of little Alen. I'm not afraid for Maja, she handles everything better than the rest of us Bošković's. Adios, Ma, I love you...

I closed the diary and put it in my lap.

The street was still. Nothing was coming through the open window. It was like I was in a trans, I slowly got up, passed through the kitchen and walked out to the yard. Viktor's hoop was hanging above the garage door. The net had withered long ago and the colour of the board had faded. In the corner of the backyard, between the wooden fence and the garage, there was an old brass rubbish bin. Vladimir kept all kind of yard stuff in there. I lifted the lid, lit my lighter, places the diary above the flame and threw it all in the bin.

*So long, Viktor...*

I went back in the same way, through the kitchen, went out to the street and banged the door shut behind me. I sat on the stairs, took out my phone, found Vladimir in my contacts and pressed the call button...

"Hello, hello!!" he groaned.

The music was blaring.

"...an't...what, wait!"



The line cut off. He called me back.

“I’m outside... I didn’t hear a word you said.”

“I haven’t said anything yet.”

“Fine. If you want to come back to the wedding, I expect you to...”

“No way in hell.”

“What do you want then? I have to go, the quests are waiting for me...”

“He killed himself because of you, you bastard...”

“Alen, what...?!”

I hung up, turned off my phone and started running. Faster and faster, I couldn’t feel the road beneath me... My spleen was bursting, sweat dripping down my face, wetting my shirt...

The CRIB was about a twenty-minute walk from our house. I got there in five. The light was on in the dining room. I barged into our room, threw myself onto the bed and buried my head into the pillow. All my walls, if there were any at all, crushed to little pieces...

## 6. Conclusion

By translating this part of Špišić's novel and analysing the process, we can conclude that many decisions throughout the translation process were made to satisfy the target culture audience. Throughout the process, both the target-oriented approach and the source-oriented approach, i.e. domestication and foreignization were used as translation strategies. Some sections of the text were foreignized excessively, going directly against the 'law' of fluency, by using techniques of resistance. These techniques were used to give the translation a touch of exoticness, to represent the source culture originally. Some sections were also omitted, even if they were important to the author, they are not important to the reader. While translating a text from a minor to a major culture, the translator can have more difficulties as he/she needs to domesticate concepts from different textual and conceptual grids, while applying significance to the transparent discourse of the minor culture presented in the major literary space. It is then the translator's individual decision to accept this discourse and thus bring success to the original novel or decide to show resistance by representing the culture through an original image.

Furthermore, though many say the translator only transfers a specific text into another language, hence his role is completed if the main message of the original text is transferred, we can see throughout this thesis, that the translation of a text from a minor literary space into the language of a major literary space is not that simple. Other than producing a fluent and faithful translation, one of the goals of translation is ensuring the acceptance of the translated text in world literature. To enter the dominant literary space the translated text must interest the target audience. The basic issue then relates to the interest of the reader who is prone to accept a transparent discourse of the minor literary space. Therefore, a minor literature is consistently under the influence of the dominant, hegemonic powers inclined to promote a

discourse of that benefits them. Even though the translator may show resistance by producing a foreignizing translation, a foreignizing translation also contributes to the transparent discourse by representing a minor literature as an exotic one. With this, we cannot truly claim that the translation process is just an aesthetic process, as it is a process which has the power to continuously promote a distorted image of a certain minor culture in the dominant literary space.

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## 8. Abstract

### The Representation of Croatia through English Translations in World Literature on the Example of the Translation of Davor Špišić's Novel *Ples s mladom*

Davor Špišić is not foreign in the Anglophone speaking literary space as some of his novels have been translated into English, moreover, his novel *Ples s mladom* can be used as an example of how a translation presents an ideological representation of a certain culture in world literature. Therefore, to show how the choice of certain translation strategies represents ideological images of a culture, this thesis is aimed to present approaches used during the translation process that contribute to an easier entrance of a minor literature into a dominant literary space. Using the theories of known authors such as Itmar Even-Zohar, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch and some less known such as Tijana Matijević and Andrea Pisac the cultural, ideological and political factors that influence a translation, in this case, the stereotypical image of Croatia as a Balkan country, is confirmed through a case study of the translation of the novel *Ples s mladom*.

**Key words:** literary translation, literary space, discourse, representation, world literature, post-Yugoslav, Davor Špišić, *Ples s mladom*.

## 9. Sažetak

### Reprezentacija Hrvatske kroz engleske prijevode u svjetskoj književnosti na primjeru prijevoda romana Davora Špišića *Ples s mladom*

Davor Špišić nije stranac u anglofonskom govornom području jer su mu neki romani već prevedeni na engleski jezik, te njegov roman *Ples s mladom* može poslužiti kao primjer prijevoda koji prikazuje ideološku reprezentaciju određene kulture u svjetskoj književnosti. Nadalje, kako bi pokazali da izbor određenih prevodilačkih strategija predstavljaju ideološke slike određene kulture, ovaj rad je usmjeren na predstavljanje pristupa koji su korišteni tijekom procesa prevođenja koji doprinose lakšem proboju književnih djela iz inferiornih književnih prostora u dominantne književne prostore. Koristeći teorije poznatih autora poput Itmar Even-Zohara, Pascale Casanove, Davida Damroscha te nekih manje poznatih poput Tijane Matijević i Andree Pisac, kulturni, ideološki i politički faktori koji utječu na prijevod, u ovom slučaju stereotipni prikaz Hrvatske kao Balkanske zemlje, potvrđeni su kroz studiju slučaja prijevoda romana *Ples s mladom*.

**Ključne riječi:** književno prevođenje, književni prostor, diskurs, reprezentacija, post-jugoslavensko, Davor Špišić, *Ples s mladom*.