

9/15/23: FUTURE PERFECT

*Is there some, any, room for optimism?*

**1. Senka MARIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

What do we mean when we talk about the future?

Are we talking about an abstract concept? A dimension of time, unreachable, unobtainable, always just an idea, never a possibility in existence? Unlike the past, which is something we've all developed many healthy and unhealthy ways of reviving, reliving, and often staying stuck in. The future is reached only by creating new content – the reification of our fears or desires. It exists solely in the imagination.

In a sense, the concept of the future very much resembles the concept of desire, in the way Lacan, Žižek and many other philosophers have talked about it. Desire can never be fulfilled. The moment you're about to reach it, it's gone. Bit of a Sisyphean fate.

It might be just the difference between *the* and *a* in English, but are we talking about the anticipation of a time guaranteed? We'll all be here, Earth will not stop rotating, its poles won't shift, we won't run out of fresh water, Sun and Moon forever in its places, plants and animals too, oceans, and the air, of course. Is that all we need? Don't we also want our lives to be happy, if not perfect? And no wars, arms conflicts, racism, misogyny, fascism? And don't we want the most passionate, most gentle love? To read all the books ever written? Have all the time to do it? I know I'm drifting, but it is seductive to even start thinking this way. I am talking about human nature, which is a different subject, but at least not unrelated. When and how to draw the line against expectations?

It is not possible to talk about the future without talking about reality. But how does one measure reality, differentiating what *is* from what is *not*? How can we be sure anything is real? I was 27 when I saw the movie *The Matrix*, and since then it has never left me. The dreadful feeling of maybe. We still don't even know the oceans, how can we even begin to comprehend the vastness and meaning and organizing forces of the universe. Socrates was a smart man, he said: *All I know is that I know nothing*. Let that be a disclaimer notice, for everything I'm saying.

Let's assume, what we witness in different aspects of our lives tells us something about where we are and where we are going. In this day and age, many people create their image of the world on the basis of social media. Instagram is saying everything is peachy and rosy. Facebook is a bit tired of putting on a bright face. Maybe that's only my friends and the people I follow. Custom-made, altered reality. I prefer TikTok. Random people, and it's already doom's day there. Time travelers from the future warning us about impending disasters, zombie deer arriving in cities, flesh-eating fungus spreading in US coastal areas (everything seems to be happening in the US!), the Simpsons have predicted everything

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International Writing Program Panel Discussion Series (Fridays 12-1 pm) Iowa City Public Library

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Tzveta Sofronieva (Germany), Senka Marić (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Iya Kiva (Ukraine)

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long ago, the end is certainly here, volcanos, super storms, super floods, super draughts, alien invasion of course, no need for super, it's enough just that they come at all, than lists and tips on how to become the best prepper... I could go on forever. All of it is just a small upgrade of the imagination in comparison to the things that are already happening.

In the meantime, the world powers are shifting, there are international corporations taking over, BRICS must mean something, there is a war in Ukraine, many conflicts across Africa, why should we care—it has nothing to do with us. We don't stop to ask who 'us' is. There was covid, is it coming again? Media is urging us in that direction. We know we are puppets, and yet, what can we possibly do?

When I was nineteen, the war started in my country. I fled to the UK, and returned to a completely destroyed city, I thought just for a visit, in 1997. And I never went back to London. Crazy, I know. But, when I arrived in my home, there was this beautiful, serene, hopeful atmosphere of a future ahead of us. The war was over, and we thought the greatest of times were coming. All the pain had not been in vain. Do I even need to say, such a future was never delivered? The war, that was over nearly 30 years ago, is just as present as ever, in all aspects of our lives.

And this is where we come to literature. If nothing else, literature teaches us that since the beginning of time, people have felt they have come to the end. More of this is not possible. The future is lost forever. And yet, we remain.

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