

**Rumena BUZAROVSKA**

## **Worlds of Arts**

It is difficult for me to speak of the art today in a global sense, as truly, the art I am in touch with – and there are limits to this contact, as well – nearly exclusively encompasses the art of the Western world. What I would be slightly more competent in addressing, though, would be the trends in art in my country, Macedonia.

I do not expect many people in this audience to know much about Macedonia, even about the Balkans – except the regular associations with war. I feel like I should provide some context for the audience, but I fret as I write this because someone will undeniably get angry about how I represent my country's complex history and identity. I will only say that Macedonia first gained statehood as part of Yugoslavia after World War II, and gained full independence after the fall of Yugoslavia in 1991. We are a landlocked country with disputes with all of our neighbors, the most famous one still being the name dispute with Greece: we will have to change our name into The Republic of Northern Macedonia if we want to be part of NATO or the EU. A year ago, we managed to get rid of a scary authoritarian government famous for the biggest wiretapping scandal in Europe and its monstrous architectural project “Skopje 2014,” in which the capital was transformed into a Las Vegas-y, monument-riddled, nightmarish architectural representation of a constructed identity. This madness incarnated in architecture cost 600 million euro-worth of taxpayer's money. The project played on the insecurity of the average Macedonian and their overwhelming inferiority complex.

Due to this complex of inferiority, I feel that my fellow countrymen suffer from an impulse to internationalize their work, in the hopes that one day they will escape from the country and become famous in America (the land they think they know from television, commercial products, and more rarely, books). We have become the victims of Halloween and Valentine's Day, adding two more holidays for the largely impoverished population to feel frustrated about. Instead of dropping the trend of acquiring the husband's last name in marriage, women are more and more resorting to acquiring the male-gendered version of the husband's surname—in other words, the grammatically incorrect, but fashionable and internationally understood version ending in “-ski.” Amidst debates about “saving” the Macedonian language from the Albanian language belonging to the large ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia, written and spoken language is becoming increasingly riddled with transliterations from the omnipresent English. Toddlers who have been given two-syllable names that sound like Greek or Roman numbers count in English first and learn the English names of colors before learning the Macedonian ones (as a side note, their parents do not know and will probably never learn how to count in Albanian). In the seedy little fast food booth in my neighborhood, I hear teenagers speaking “American English” to each other over diluted ketchup and soggy fries. Instead of using the juicy abundance of domestic swear words, they will rather use the f-word in either expressing annoyance or amazement. My students come back from their work-and-travel trip to the US and consider it glamorous to insert twenty likes in every sentence and then end it with a question mark.

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ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, September 7, 2018

Buzarovska (Macedonia), Batsuuri (Mongolia), Oddang (Indonesia), Echeto (Venezuela)

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The trend of aiming to make the work sound universal is something that we have seen in Macedonian literature, especially in contemporary poetry. It seems that the young and middle generations of poets favor an escapist mode of creation. They seem to reside in a bubble, far away from the post-socialist transitional, corrupt era of independent Macedonia, a bubble where love reigns supreme. They may have inherited this from the past generations of adored (mostly male) poets where Nature, Woman, and the godly Writer-Creator are the main poetic subjects. In prose it is thankfully a little different. The novels and stories of postwar writers are mainly dark depictions of cruel rural life during the war – something in line with regional literature that still references the experiences of the Yugoslav Civil War. The new generations have now moved away from the trends of escapism or rural war stories to critical renditions of experiences that reflect the spirit of our time.

I could not agree more with Flannery O’Connor, who implies in her essay “Writing Short Stories” that the general should be shown through the particular. Like her, I do not believe that anything meaningful can emerge if the local idiom is ignored. What she says in this essay continues to be my guide: “[W]hen the life that actually surrounds us is totally ignored, when our patterns of speech are absolutely overlooked, then something is out of kilter. The writer should then ask himself if he is not reaching out for a kind of life that is artificial to him.”

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