



POETRY

War-themed Poems

Diana Burazer

About the Poems

Where did these poems come from? I never sought to write about war or the suffering it imposes on people. But the war in my homeland of Croatia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I lived for about 20 years and where I have friends and relatives of my husband, and the constant media reports from war zones around the world could not leave me indifferent. I moved to Zagreb (Croatia) during that war, in 1992, due to the conflict in the city where I had been living, Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina). I also witnessed the suffering of friends and the persecution of people just for being a different nationality. All of this marked my poems.



I never take sides in my poems but focus on the ordinary person, whichever side they are on. The poem “Migrants” is about a man in a refugee column, fleeing war towards a different but better life. A youth who carries a flag in an undefined war and whose death will, in the end, be in vain, is the subject of the poem “Flags”. In “Mostar”, I write about my friend, a poet who remains in war-torn Mostar but cannot leave because of his attachment to it. I also touch on the sensitive topic of terrorism and poetically address its causes, in “Terrorists”. Because within us lies the decision of what we will become; we all hold light and darkness between our palms. I was particularly interested in armies, as a group of human individuals, reduced (often by force) to a common denominator of belonging to a shared idea. I write about the relations between victors and vanquished, in the poem “Where Does the Army Go After Defeat”.

At a literary event one evening, after reading these poems, a man (known as quite exclusive and one-sided in his political views) asked me why I did not choose one side more clearly in my poems. My answer was: *I think I chose a side very clearly! My choice is always: ordinary people! Those who are unjustly threatened and exiled because of policies that they often do not understand, or if they do understand, do not value as highly as their home, family, and friends!*

About the Poet

Diana Burazer was born in Zagreb, Croatia, 1953, and graduated in Theoretical Mathematics at the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. From 1977 to 1992 she lived in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and since then she has lived and worked in Zagreb. She has published in many Croatian and BiH journals, represented in anthologies and panoramas of Croatian poetry, winner of many awards. Her poems have been translated and published in about 15 foreign languages. She writes poetry, poems in prose, and short stories. She is the editor of the publishing house “Fidipid”. She has published seven books of poetry and four books (selection of poetry) in Macedonian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Albanian. She is a member of the Croatian Writers’ Association (DHK), the Croatian PEN, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Writers’ Association, and the DHK Herceg Bosna.

MIGRANTS

You need to walk
just walk forward,
says the bravest of us,
walk
walk.

Tiny bodies in oversized coats,
trembling disorientation in their bosoms.

Walk
just forward
walk,
says the most persistent of us.

When we give up
strengthen us with the phrases that no one but us
will deliver the truth into the empty sphere of the world.

Walk
walk,
says the loudest of us.

We are moving away from the cities of our lightheartedness
from familiar crying and laughing.
We are putting our reason in a state of rest,
being free we breathe into the emptiness.

Walk
Walk,
says the leader,
just forward
walk.

As we wonder if this obedience too is just a form of slavery
we reach the end of possible movement.
Almost happy for the sudden turnaround
we stand opposite other unknown walkers.

Being worn out we have our hearts tested,
we lean our bodies against the wire -
an unwound ball of pain

no matter which side we approach it.

(New poem; translation: Miroslav Kirin; original title in Croatian language "Migranti")

THE TERRORISTS

Between our palms
light and darkness.

We give them but a narrow passage
to our internal storeroom,
we set their duration and meaning.

Dangerous times are knocking
at the weak door.

The polite sign "open/closed"
is not meant for all
of history's passers-by.
Nameless scars and logbooks
of all of those who entered and exited
offer feeble hope that we'll recognize the intruders,
wretches of the night,
strapped with the invisible signs of hatred.

And it could be so simple:
we open the door with the key
if they have been locked at all,

the palms of our hands
with the heart
the evil predecessors
have unconditionally disowned.

*(Poem from the book Heavenly Apples; translation: Tomislav Kuzmanović;
original title in Croatian language "Teroristi")*

WHERE DOES THE ARMY GO AFTER THE DEFEAT

Where does that the mighty army go after the defeat?
The squares are occupied by flags of different colors
hoarse victors
parade along the wide streets
embraced and temporarily immortal.
A mass presentation of impoverished dialogue
and simplified happiness.

Where does the army go after the defeat?

To the springs
of healing
miraculous water,
where even god cures himself from delivering frivolous justice,
to the places where
forgiveness and oblivion
are given out
all at once.

Somewhere, outside of it all
in silence,
a warm soup and a white bed,
are already set,
waiting,

the comfort
that keeps the truth
at bay.

*(Poem from the book Heavenly Apples; translation: Tomislav Kuzmanović;
original title in Croatian language "Kamo ide vojska nakon poraza")*

FLAGS

Sorrowful is the courage of a flag bearer in a war.
Instead of a weapon
he carries a flag
he was told is worth even dying for.
He is usually too young to understand,
but the boyish trust and passion
are enough
for the very act of carrying.

He dreamt, however, of riding a horse,
driving a tank,
charging with a gun.
From the crowd on the battlefield and war cries on both sides,
he is no longer sure of anything.
And doesn't really have time to think.
He charges gripping painfully
a wooden,
barren
tool.
With occasional loud shouts,
of recently learned slogans,
he feeds his weakened courage.

On a big field once green
His death is
just about futile.
Flag he carried will be somewhere else tomorrow
treaded on or burned.
Medals are always received by others.
Boys flag bearers
like those who bring water to the thirsty
no one even remembers.

(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Sunčica Kragulj; original title in Croatian language "Zastave")

MOSTAR

(to N. Borozan*)

I will come even there and there
I promised,
pointing with my head
to the two opposite sides of the world,
trying to give an impression that I understand everything and
that my loyalty is unconditional.

I will walk along the Neretva(**)
if I can't do otherwise.
I will be hugging the river banks
with my left and right hand
I say,
with a carefully measured smile
so that everything we have just talked about
would lose its sad seriousness.

It is simpler and easier for you to love this city -
says my friend
who would probably die of sadness if he had to leave it.

He doesn't say much about it in his letters,
he has moved into his own verses,
and thus, detached,
bravely deals with its ugly facades,
with black beams where roofs used to be,
with the graves in the park,
with the parks grown wildly within the walls.

Every time before I come back,
he puts a gilt of memory
and hope
for me.

In a café, in the afternoon,
both trapped in a cloud of his pipe smoke,
beyond reality and all sin,
with the same fervor
as before
he talks about his new love

* *Friend, poet from City Mostar (Bosnia and Hercegovina)*

** *River in Mostar*

*(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin; original
title in Croatian language "Mostar")*

SMS, MOSTAR (I)

Cities will be like
the people who live in them -
I typed the answer
with a trembling hand
fearing for the City.

*(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin;
original title in Croatian language "SMS, Mostar I")*

SMS, MOSTAR (II)

My love lived there -
I say with awe,
because everything changes:
neither is love the same anymore,
nor is the City.

*(Poem from the book Orange; translation: Miroslav Kirin;
original title in Croatian language "SMS, Mostar II")*