www.dereta.rs

Original title

Milorad Pavić

UNUTRAŠNJA STRANA VETRA

ILI

ROMAN O HERI I LEANDRU

Editor

Maja Stefanović

Our sincere gratitude goes to the Bequest of Milorad Pavić and to Jasmina Mihajlović for their assistance in the preparation of this edition.

Milorad Pavić

THE INNER SIDE OF THE WIND

OR

The Novel of Hero and Leander

Translated from the Serbian by
Kristina Pribićević – Zorić

Belgrade
2016
DERETA

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

821.163.41-31

PAVIĆ, Milorad, 1929–2009

The Inner Side of the Wind or The Novel of Hero and Leander / Milorad Pavić ; translated from the Serbian by Kristina Pribićević–Zorić. – 2nd ed. – Beograd : Dereta, 2016 (Beograd : Dereta). – 80, 67 str. ; 21 cm

Prevod dela: Unutrašnja strana vetra ili Roman o o Heri i Leandru. – Drugi deo romana štampan u obrnutom smeru. – Tiraž 1.000.

ISBN 978-86-6457-068-8

COBISS.SR-ID 224205068

HERO

The inner side of the wind is the one
that remains dry when the wind
blows through the rain

One of the Cheap Prophets

I

In the first part of her life, a woman gives birth, and in the second, she kills and buries either herself or those around her. The question is, when does this second part begin?"

Thinking these thoughts, chemistry student Heroneja Bukur cracked the hard-boiled egg against her brow and ate it. That was all she had by way of provisions. Her hair was so long she used it in place of a shoehorn. She lived in the busiest part of Belgrade, in a rented room above the Golden Keg cafe, and kept her refrigerator full of love stories and cosmetics. She was young; she would crumple the banknotes in her hand like a hanky when she went shopping, and she dreamed of lying on the water somewhere on the coast and sleeping for half an hour in the afternoon. She remembered her father's hands, with their wrinkles that rippled like waves in the wind, and she knew how to keep silent in both major and minor keys. They called her Hero; she adored peppers, she sported an ever-spicy kiss and, under her white chemist's coat, a pair of mustachioed breasts. She was so fast she could bite off her own ear; she digested food before it left her mouth, and realized that

every couple of centuries some women's names become men's, while the rest remain the same.

There was something, however, that she simply could not fit into her clear picture of the world: dreams. How, in such a simple life, with only one's two ears to run between, could something as inexplicable as dreams occur every night — something that lasted even after death?

"Dreams reincarnate themselves," thought Hero, "and often they are female dreams in male bodies and vice versa... How many people one meets in dreams nowadays! As never before! I'm already overpopulated!"

Thus concluded Hero. Without a second thought, she bought a hard-covered register and, following all the rules of double-entry bookkeeping, began taking stock of her dreams. She was determined to clear the matter up. She wrote down everything that appeared in these dreams — porcelain, pears and buildings, unicorns and horses, hairpins and ships, wild donkeys and angels, glasses and the peridex tree where the alighting dove became a crow, kitchen chairs and chimeras that fertilized through the ear, automobiles and the aromatic bellow of the panther that irresistibly attracted other game from her dreams — entering them all one by one in the separate sections, giving each article a number, price, and date of entry in the book. Appearing especially often in her dreams was a serpent that dared not cross the shadow of a tree. In such instances, the serpent usually slithered up the tree and acted like a branch until a bird alit on it. Then the serpent would ask the bird a question. If it did not give the correct answer, the serpent would eat it. Hero did not know whether this merited one column or two. The other most frequently entered item in Hero's book of dreams was a tiny little boy. The boy's father

ate nothing but meat, and his mother nothing but lentils. Because of the father, the child dared taste only meat; and because of the mother, only lentils; and so he came to Hero's dream to die of hunger.

"Obviously, we inside ourselves and others within us run an enormous distance every day," Hero noted on the margins of her register. "We make this journey by some kind of internal movements that are quick and capable of covering an expanse we will never cover in life. This internal movement in dreams is more perfect than external movement, because immobility is infallible, it is the prime mover of everything and embraces even movement in its motionlessness. But," she thought on, "a dream can also be perceived as an animal."

Since she and her brother had been learning foreign languages ever since childhood, Hero took special care with the inventory of linguistic forms she and others used in her dreams. It was rather like a grammar book of dreams — the linguistics of dreaming, and a lexicon of words used while sleeping. This dictionary of Hero's was a lot like those "doggie dictionaries" that were the rage among young ladies in the late 1920s, in which they wrote expressions understood by their wolfhounds, poodles, or bull terriers. So too in Hero's dictionary a dream was treated like an animal that did not speak the same language as its master, but could learn the occasional word from Hero's language of reality, just as Hero herself slowly started to learn the grammar of this strange animal's language. She concluded that, in the language of dreams, all the nouns exist but the verbs do not have all the tenses they have in reality.

This particular morning, however, she did not care about dreams. March was stealing days from February, the

grass stuffing in the armchairs exuded smells as if the grass were fresh, while with a red pencil she corrected and graded the postcards written to her in French by her pupils during winter recess. She earned her living by tutoring bad students, but now was not the season; two hearts beat in her canines, one in each tooth, she suffered from hunger like a fish, and her left thigh burned her right while she leafed through the newspaper. There it was written:

French teacher wanted twice a week to tutor children.
Dobračina St. 6/III.

She wrapped her ears up in braids and found herself in No. 6 Dobračina Street, third floor, courtyard entrance. Here the apartments each had one window in the sun and one in the wind, but in summer even the dogs inside were full of moths. She leaned the back of her head against the doorbell, took lip gloss out of her bag, rubbed her lower lip with the upended case of rouge, then her lower against her upper lip, and pressed the bell with her head. Simonović — she read on the nameplate, and entered. She was admitted by a ten-year-old boy; she knew immediately that he was to be her pupil and, following him in, she thought: "This one's got a high ass, it starts at the waist." The Simonović seated her on a three-legged chair. First they needed to determine how much she would receive monthly for tutoring. A thousand dinars per child was inviting, and she agreed. She sat girded by her hair, counted her teeth with her tongue, and watched Mr. Simonović's left eye blink every time he pronounced an "r." They waited a bit for night

to fall, and then poured strong drinks into three slender glasses.

"To your hearty health!" said the host, blinking twice with his left eye as though counting the bones in his tongue. Hero had just started to feel that she was wasting her time when she noticed a strange supplicating smile on the lips of the woman. It quivered there like a frightened little animal.

"Their children must be as shallow as the palm of the hand for things to have come to this!" Hero decided. At that very moment, her hand grazed the glass. A few drops spilled on her dress. She looked at the spot, noticed that the stain was spreading, and quickly took her leave. Departing, she had the feeling that her nails were growing at vertiginous speed.

In Vasina Street she bought two big notebooks, and that same evening prepared them for her future pupils. As she had been taught when she was a child, she drew a red line down each page, dividing it in two. The right-hand column was for the *present* and *past tenses* of French verbs; the left-hand was for the *future tense*, *the conditional*, and *the participle*, which denotes action parallel to the main clause.

Outside, winter dampness was alternating with summer dampness, and houses were releasing last year's smells into the rooms, when Hero took the notebooks and went to give her first lesson in Dobračina Street. The "devil bites" on the soles of her feet were hurting her as she entered the Simonović apartment on the third floor.

"Tell me, but honestly, what day is it?" she asked her pupil, watching him the way a snake does a frog. He became

flustered; she saw him steam with a strange sweat, and he again turned his backside to her.

He led her to a table surrounded by three green chairs; the lamp burned in the dark room by day and was turned off at night, because nobody sat here in the evenings. A moment later, they were sipping tea; she watched the boy crush a lump of sugar into the cup with his nails and then suck his finger, after which he started to write his first French verbs in the new notebook. Placed on the table in front of them was a third teacup, but it remained unused.

"Are you afraid of death?" he suddenly asked Hero.

"I don't know anything about death; all I know is that I will die at twelve-oh-five."

"What do you mean, at twelve-oh-five?"

"Just what I said. All the Bukurs in my family were sappers. They set the mines to explode at noon, a fact that was known where they worked — in the mine, on the railroad, or elsewhere — and so people took cover as soon as the noonday siren blew. If the mine didn't explode, then at twelve-oh-five one of the Bukurs would have to go and see what was wrong. And that was usually the end of them."

"But why should you die at twelve-oh-five when you're not a sapper?"

"Simple. The chemical institute where I study closes at noon. I leave the dangerous, forbidden experiments for after twelve, when everybody has gone, and then I light a real fire. Everybody tells me: 'You'll die like the rest of your people at twelve-oh-five...' Now, please be so kind as to get on with your lesson, or else you'll never become your own

man; for the rest of your life, you'll sneeze like your father and yawn like your mother."

While she was talking, Hero looked at that third, unused cup and the other notebook that lay on the table facing the third chair, and she was disappointed that the other child had not appeared as well; the family's ad and conversations had used the plural, and the remuneration was to be commensurate.

"These people rise three days before dawn," she thought, then assigned a new lesson and descended into the rain, walking on the "devil bites," which now hurt even more. Her arches were falling.

But they had not even had time to fall flat when something unexpected happened. The month was drawing to a close; it was a time when dogs fed on grass, and one morning, for the first time, she found on the table in Dobračina Street her pay envelope. Instead of a thousand dinars, twice that amount was inside: she had been paid for two pupils, not one.

"What are these other thousand dinars doing here?" she asked the boy.

"They're for Kaćunčica."

"Kaćunčica?"

"We have a Kaćunčica."

"I'll hit you so hard I'll knock your hair off! Who is Kaćunčica?" "My sister," replied the boy, with a smile so broad it chased his ears down his neck.

"But why doesn't this Kaćunčica of yours appear for her lessons?"

"I wish I knew."