

The Voyages of the Spaceship *TEMPUS*

Branko Crnogorac, Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

When one comes to think that only ten years ago it was less an ordeal for NASA to explore the outer worlds than for most academics from the region of South East Europe to get to know what their colleagues across the border were up to, one realizes what a huge success a project such as this year's Maribor Summer School truly is. This was even more so, given the tasks and far-reaching consequences arising from it and from the overall SEEPALS project itself, of harmonizing part of an important field of public interest within countries that have hardly harmonized anything so far.

Only, this time the protagonists were quite different. One might say it was the picturesque landscape that affected both the speakers and the audience, sunny days and hot but not *dry* nights; one might argue that it was the relief of a much awaited vacation and, now comes the best part, a funded one, smiles still lingering on our faces from the very thought of it, but one can't deny one felt strangely comfortable and relaxed delivering ideas and arguments one had probably delivered many times before on such important topics as the role of culture and literature in our lives. But rarely had one experienced the matter among an equally diverse and intellectually challenging audience as chance presented us with an opportunity at the foot of Pohorje. Sadly, there are probably more alien forms recorded by space agencies worldwide than ethnic diversity in the majority of our classes at all levels of our educational system, and even more sadly, if there is an exception or two, anyone performing the role of teacher is immediately struck by another, no less irritating problem: that of dealing with even less activity in class than recorded among the alleged extra-terrestrials from earlier in the story. So it is no wonder that these poor instructors found themselves confused by both the descent and curiosity of the listeners, all of whom were paying close attention to what was being said about the issues that largely concern the region we share. Instead of one denomination, there were now several mixed together, highly sensitive to each other, ethnic groups separated but virtually inseparable in their quest for the civilized norms that they felt lay somewhere else other than within themselves. All of a sudden, the piece of fiction or line of poetry one was talking about no longer seemed a matter of distant place but presented itself as a more vivid reality than any issue enjoying the privilege of immediacy. Often far-fetched notions of cultural understanding, uttered in a rather too homogenized classroom--phrases informing one of the necessity for recognizing and acknowledging otherness--finally make sense among eager and sharp-witted participants, boldly unraveling layer upon layer of the text in front of them, discussing it both among themselves and with the lecturer. In an atmosphere of open-mindedness, no topic is a taboo, so cherries were happily sexed and certain male organs bitten off and digested in literary terms, without one having the feeling that one was addressing an ostrich in terms of safety issues. Furthermore, one was encouraged when they were informed that national folk songs are not the copyright of any single nation, having witnessed first-hand the reaction to a beautifully sung piece of poetry from the southern tip of our region, reading from the lips of the audience different sounds which reverberated to the same rhythm

Still, one is obliged not to forget that one is visiting another planet, and that the settlement one inhabits is a temporary one, which should prevent one from being disillusioned upon coming back to the mother planet. Not for the sake of themselves, for they are immune to the pettiness of artificial divisions imposed on us by a certain THEM, but for the sake of those to whom such lectures will be repeated with the anticipation of provoking the same reaction. However, this very much resembles a fairy tale, and one should have realized by

now that fairy tales could take quite the opposite direction: for instance, that a self-confident princess might leave the prince for another princess. Therefore, although these lines are being written in autumn, harvest time, one should first plant some seeds brought from space and take good care of them if one wants the same yield. Once the seeds spring up, one's task begins: to make sure they ripen to spill their own seeds in every nook of the country.

As for ourselves, the privileged ones dealing with the world of fiction, this summer's intoxication is here to stay and remind us that it is these small victories within the walls of the tentative classrooms for which we can hope only a few times in our careers—these are the victories that will inspire those who make life-affecting decisions in the world of non-fictional reality.