



sarajevo blues

Semezdin Mehmedinović

Translated from the Bosnian by Ammiel Alcalay

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From one of Bosnia's most prominent poets and writers: spare and haunting stories and poems that were written under the horrific circumstances of the recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Semezdin Mehmedinovic remained a citizen of Sarajevo throughout the Serbian nationalists' siege and was active throughout the war in the city's resistance movement, as one of the editor's of the magazine Phantom of Liberty.

Semezdin Mehmedinovic says that "writing is, finally, quite a personal thing that doesn't make much sense unless you are practicing for the last word." For those Bosnians emerging from the siege or still in exile, these "last words" remain intimate possessions, one of the last bastions left against the commodification of tragedy.

Sarajevo Blues Details

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From Reader Review *Sarajevo Blues* for online ebook

Brendan says

Semezdin Mehmedinovic is a Bosnian writer and a survivor of the seige of Sarajevo. In *Sarajevo Blues*, he reflects on the means by which the horror of that conflict was transmitted around the world. Can it be possible, his essays, poems, and stories want to know, for even the sharpest of camera angles to produce an accurate reflection of war?

“Shots of the mass killing . . . circle the globe,” he writes. “Pictures of the dead and massacred turn into an ad for the war. It doesn’t matter that these people have names: TV translates them into its cool language, the naked image.”

This was fresh back in 1998, and it's still worth thinking about.

Laurel says

I appreciated the translator's introduction to the collection, his concept of literary activism and the interview between translator and author in the conclusion. Mehmedinovic's response to the comment about being a representative of the war - the media turned the world's eyes to Bosnia and this initial war coverage drew readers into a search for a deeper response through literature and film - is certainly true in my case. The collection offers a look into a people under siege and a small understanding of why that experience alters them forever.

Mallowmrawr says

Detached and disheartening. Very sad prose concerned with this novel. Encourages awareness of the things that happen outside our own little "world", makes you notice things that are usually taken for granted on our end.

Naz says

ve içimden kahkahalarla gülmek geldi sana
çünkü buraya cehennem diyorsun
ve buradan kaç?yorsun, san?yorsun ki
Saraybosna’dan ba?ka yerde ölüm yok

Joanne says

Post-modern essays and poetry, written and lives in Sarajevo during the siege of Sarajevo in the early 90's.

Sue says

I will repeat what I wrote in a comment earlier along in my reading. This work is intense, moving, lyrical at times, heartbreaking. The author describes the days, and nights, of a city in the midst of war and the lives and deaths of the people in the city. Then he tells of his life in that city. There is occasional beauty but more bullets and bloodshed, and the thankless tasks of staying alive. This is the side of war I haven't read much about. We should all probably see this side.

I will read this again, parts of it many times. I especially loved the poem "Essay", the final poem "Dates", and the essay "Crows". I've been trying to decide between 4, 4.5 and 5 as a rating. I believe I will go with the 5. There is so much in the book. I believe I will find more at each reading.

Sirius Black says

Ülkede bu kadar bo?nak varken, bosna yak?ndan ilgenilen bir konuyken burada Türkçe yap?lan yorumlar?n azl??? dü?ündürücü. Sava??n ortas?nda günlük hayat?n? sürdüren insanlar? görebilece?iniz bir kitap. Art?k duyars?zla?t?klar? için de?il, ba?ka türlüünü bilmedikleri için ve biraz "normal"li?i tadabilmek için gündelik hayatlar?na devam ediyorlar. Gazete ç?kar?yor, radyo programlar? yap?yor, film festivalleri organize ediyorlar. Beraber bira içip futbol oynad??? arkada??n yar?n kafana silah day?yor. Sava?lar berbat dememe gerek yok herhalde. Sava? insan?n do?as?n? gözlemlemenin en kat???ks?z yolu. Asl?nda kendimizi dü?ündü?ümüzde ?u da ortaya ç?k?yor. Dün Bosna'da bugün Suriye'de yar?n ba?ka bir yerde sava? devam edecek. 21. yüzy?lda ne medeniyet ne de güvendi?imiz ba?ka insani de?erler ya da fiziki durumlar buna kar?? ç?kacak. insanlar en iyisi bula?mamay?, uzaktan oturup seyretmeyi, sonra da birkaç protestoyla ya da benzeri ?eylerle vicdan?n? rahatlatmay? bilecek.

montana says

the poem 'crows' steals breath. it is prose. it is poetry. it is gorgeous. he was a georgetown u. lannan visiting writer, my sophomore year. as i recall, soft spoken.

Nelly says

Excellent collection of poetry and prose that creates a meaningful look into life in Bosnia before, during and after the genocide.

Hafsa says

This is a collection of poetry and prose by Bosnian writer Mehmedinovic. In this book he describes his experiences living under siege in Sarajevo, his writing is hard-hitting and thought-provoking. The themes of

hopelessness, fear, loss and desperation are universal even if the book is about a specific place and time. If I could pick out a central idea it would be about the loss of identity in Bosnia where Sarajevo became unrecognisable and neighbours turned against each other. Although this is a short book it is by no means easy to get through, I would recommend it to someone familiar with the Bosnian war and wanting understand the experience of war.

Dayna Smith says

One of Bosnia prominent poets and writers, Mehmedinovic stayed in Sarajevo during the war and this book of short stories and poems takes you to the war torn city and lets you experience for yourself the horror of a war Americans still know little about. A magnificent work, this book is a Reader's Corner Highly Recommended Read.

Sarah says

I often caught [my son] poring over maps. He was very interested in Greenland. When I asked why he wanted to go there, he replied: "Cause there's no people there."

Hey, me too.

Ugh, I thought this would be a lot more, I don't know, accessible? I liked the prose poems much better than the other ones, which made me feel even more sure that poems shouldn't be translated. There is nothing to latch onto in these poems, they slip away.

I think I will blame all the spelling mistakes and the grammatical errors on Lawrence Ferlinghetti's slipshod editing.

William West says

While I don't actively endorse the author's political perspective, he does write beautifully and conveys a haunting sense of day to day, urban life in the midst of civil war.

Andrew says

Two other works popped into my mind when I was reading this set of stories, poems and essays: Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah" documentary and Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem. Why? All three in their own way tackle the horrors of war and genocide, and all three do so not through vivid description of the brutality but with a sort of detached, unfinished voice. Seems to go against common sense but I find such depictions of war much more jarring and powerful than sensationized, tear-jerking ones.

Also, don't skip out on the interview with Mehmedinovic at the end. His responses to the questions and outlook on post-war & post-Yugoslav society show a fierce intelligence and his genius with words.

Teresa says

This is a slim book, but it is not a quick read. That's not a complaint. The topics are difficult and dense, and they deserve -- even demand -- more than one reading. The poems near the end were probably my favorites, and you needed to read what came before them, including the essays, to feel their full power.
