

The Body That Has to Be Lived in – Proposal for a Book in Translation

Original title (Macedonian): *Телото во кое треба да се живее*

Author: Petar Andonovski

Title in Translation (English): *The Body That Has to Be Lived in*

Translator (English): Marija Jones

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Full English translation available.



About the book

The Body That Has To Be Lived In follows the internal struggles of Brigitte, a sixty-year-old judge at the very end of her career who is suddenly assigned the only challenging and complex trial she has ever undertaken in her working life — a criminal case concerning the rape and murder of a young woman. Before this final case, Brigitte has only ever judged minor cases of divorce and petty theft – a kind of cheap theatre. But now she becomes abruptly aware of the marginal role she has played in the world - and of the opportunity this murder trial offers. The case opens the key for Brigitte’s path of self-realization as she finally assumes the power given to her as a judge – the power of arbitration. The novel follows Brigitte’s internal test of character in parallel with the development of the trial of the young man accused of killing his girlfriend. This internal journey is initiated by her confronting the lawbreaker — confronting the body of the accused, over which society and the law, embodied in herself, will execute its punishment.

The author of *The Body That Has To Be Lived In* offers us prose with subversive ideological reflection and a subtle novelistic questioning of the spirit of an epoch and a system that deeply traumatizes people. The individual trauma in the focus of his interest is not closed within itself but reflects the collective traumas caused by societal reductionism. The image of the body ‘sacrificed’ on a daily basis is the most powerful answer to the question of how to write today. Andonovski demonstrates, unlike most of the younger writers, that one must write responsibly, that one cannot escape one’s reality and that a good novel must have an attitude.

About the Author

Petar Andonovski was born in 1987, in Kumanovo, Macedonia. He studied general and comparative literature at the Faculty of Philology in Skopje. He has published the following books: *Mental Space* (poetry, 2008), *Eyes the Color of Shoes* (novel, 2013, second and third edition 2016), *The Body That Has To Be Lived In* (novel, 2015, second and third edition 2016). His first novel *Eyes the Color of Shoes* was shortlisted for the Utrinski Vesnik Novel of the Year Award in 2013. In 2016 this novel was shortlisted for the European Union Prize for Literature.

The novel *The Body That Has To Be Lived In* won the Utrinski Vesnik Novel of the Year Award in 2015.

About the Translator

Marija Jones was born in Skopje, Macedonia in 1968. She studied drama directing, comparative literature and English in Skopje and art in London.

She worked as a part-time radio journalist and a teacher of Macedonian as a foreign language before acquiring CTEFL from the International House London and then worked as a teacher of English as a foreign language in Skopje, Macedonia, Morocco, Estonia, Hungary and Great Britain.

She has worked as a translator from English into Macedonian and from Macedonian into English for almost two decades and has translated more than 80 titles.

For more than a decade she has been translating the works by the Macedonian candidates for the contemporary Balkan literary award 'Balkanika' and novels and literary theory works for other projects (Kjulavkova, Stardelov, Madzunkov Andonovski).

SAMPLE TRANSLATION

SENTENCE

Brigitte, a sixty-year-old judge, bustled into the court with the greatest possible urgency to pronounce the harshest sentence she had ever imposed in her career...

If she could have imposed the death penalty she would have done so without hesitation. She was prepared to stretch the law even to ensure he received the worst possible sentence for his crime. For he must be punished - he must! But just as sure as she was that the sentence must be as harsh as possible, so she was sure she should never have accepted that case in the first place.

She had wanted to refuse the case. It seemed far too complicated. Before that she had only worked on smaller cases - violent car crimes and petty thefts. She'd even accepted divorces cases on occasions, enjoying the drama of spouses arguing over who was entitled to the TV or the wardrobe.

She had been scared when first assigned the case. She had never worked on such a complex trial.

Brigitte had never been ambitious. She had never lived her life 'at first hand'. She'd always been a mere observer, never a participant in life. But if she could have started all over again she would have done things differently. The irresolute and timid person she had become would instead have been bold to choose the hardest cases and impose the severest sentences. Her fear and indecision would have been replaced by power...

And yet hadn't the power been in her hands all the time? How could she not have noticed that?! The thought of power made her happy, ennobled her, made her feel more confident. Power had been at her fingertips all this time but she had only just realised it – at the very moment when the trial was approaching its end.

MESSAGES

1.

"I saw how your 'fern-coloured eyes' goggled in front of me in horror and fear" read the message she received in the morning. The message did not have a sender but Brigitte knew who it was. Only in front of him did her eyes goggle in horror and fear. Only he could scare her to death.

Her eyes now glanced briefly at the dossier about a twenty-nine-year-old girl discovered dead in her flat. According to the forensic report, the girl was raped and then strangled. She had been alone in the flat. Her parents were away at their country house for the

weekend and only discovered the terrible crime two days after it occurred. The only suspect was her thirty-two-year-old boyfriend, XX.

“XX has not been convicted of any crime before. Except for several criminal charges for fights, there are no other charges against him.”

Brigitte returned to the sentence that said “according to the forensic report, the girl was first raped and then strangled”. She underlined the words with a red marker and then read the content of the message again. As she imagined it, her body shrunk and she choked. Her panic only increased when she remembered he had her telephone number. But what confused her most was why he had written that her eyes were ‘fern-coloured’. Her eyes could be described as pine-coloured, or pine-cone-coloured or whatever, but never fern-coloured. She did not have green eyes. Her eyes were brown - of that she was well aware.

She fished a small mirror out of her bag and raised it to the level of her eyes. Peering deep inside them she saw in their reflection the very thing she was most afraid to see. Her eyes - the eyes she had looked at in the mirror for sixty years - now looked different. She lowered the mirror to recover from the shock, a vague sense of horror forcing her to look at something else. But soon enough she raised the mirror to look at exactly the same thing as before. Her eyes were not brown at all. All of a sudden, a million questions swarmed in her head. Might they really be green after all? Perhaps they had seemed brown before because she’d always looked at herself in mirrors in dimly lit rooms? Perhaps some unnoticed object had always cast a shadow and made the green of her eyes look brown? She stood up and went to the window. She placed the mirror on the windowsill so that the sun could shed more light on her eyes. As she looked at the mirror, her eyes seemed brown only for a moment before they turned green. She now looked at a green-eyed woman in the mirror – not at any woman, but at herself, Brigitte. Yes, her eyes were green. Fern-coloured.

Her entire world toppled. She had lived in an illusion for sixty years. For sixty years she had been seeing a different reflection in the mirror. This realization upset her a great deal. All that she wanted now was to get away as far as possible from the courthouse.

2.

Brigitte lived alone in a flat with only two rooms and a kitchen on the outskirts of Skopje, far from any kind of human presence. Whenever anyone asked her why she hadn’t moved to the centre of town or somewhere closer to the courthouse, she always responded that

her job was dangerous and that she couldn't afford to live somewhere where the criminals from her court cases might find her. People showed understanding for this opinion of hers and didn't bother her anymore, though in fact it was a lie that Brigitte herself did not believe. She had never had a problem with the defendants and convicts in her cases. She had always been too lenient to attract revenge.

A long time ago, Brigitte took a cat. Within a week she had fed the cat with poisoned food. She didn't know any other way of getting rid of the animal, and this seemed painless. Brigitte didn't like anyone twisting and coiling around her legs or getting attached to her. Such attachment she could no longer stand and so she decided to get rid of the cat that clung to her day and night. Brigitte had likewise avoided men who wished to get attached. After a few short relationships in her youth, most of her life she was in a loose relationship with Thomas. He was a year younger than her. They met in court. He was a surgeon charged with having killed a patient through neglect. Another judge had been in charge of the case, but it was passed to Brigitte when that judge had to take sick leave. The case was already in its closing stage and Brigitte just ruled in Thomas's favour without a second thought. In gratitude, Thomas began sending her flowers and dinner invitations. Although no man had ever performed such niceties for her, she was not attracted by the flowers or romantic dinners but by the fact that he was married and a father of two children. Brigitte immediately recognized him as the ideal man - a man to whom she could not get attached and who could not get attached to her. The flowers and romantic dinners were soon replaced by short meetings at her house, whenever his wife was out or after a marital row between them. Brigitte and Thomas took trips together sometimes. He would tell his wife that he was going on a business trip and Brigitte would pack her suitcases with great pleasure, enjoying the advantage over him that she didn't have to justify her acts to anyone. Brigitte had not seen other men since meeting him. She was faithful to him, not because she loved him but because she wished to avoid getting herself into a situation in which she could be held accountable to anyone. She was incapable of keeping two lovers. Brigitte did have occasional trysts with other men, but those were accidental adventures with men she was sure she would never see again in her life. Her first infidelity, which wasn't exactly that, although she liked calling it so, happened during their joint trip to Crete. That summer, they decided to go on holiday together because that year was the tenth anniversary of their relationship. Brigitte didn't much care about it, but he believed that they had to celebrate an important date for both of them - especially for him. The date when ten years ago he was proclaimed innocent and permitted to continue with his life instead of going to prison. Instead of wasting away in a prison cell he could go on living in the comfortable villa

he owned on Vodno together with his family, and that provided him with a sense of great security.

When they arrived in Athens they had seven hours to spend before the departure of their boat to Crete. They were too tired to take a tour around the city and decided to spend the day in the port of Piraeus. Brigitte was not used to spending such long and uninterrupted stretches of much time together with him. She preferred to spend the time before the departure of the boat on her own. She didn't want to stray too far away in case she got lost. When she left the port, she walked towards Odysseus Square, just across from the port. She crossed the square and continued towards Alipedou Street. The street had become a flea market and Brigitte wandered around the improvised stalls where Pakistanis and Nigerians sold clothes and bags. Brigitte feigned disinterestedness and stopped in front of some of the stalls for only a few moments. While she was moving among all those bodies, she felt uncomfortable whenever she brushed against or bumped into someone. Even the thought of coming into contact with someone else's body was repellent to her. A woman stopped next to Brigitte and said something in screeching Greek and then repeated it in English: "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis stink!" A Pakistani standing near the woman and Brigitte tried to shove a bag in Brigitte's hands nervously, offering it to her half-price. In order to get rid of him, Brigitte said that she would prefer a red bag. The Pakistani looked at her questioningly and then asked her to follow him because he apparently had a red bag in the storage house. Brigitte followed him, walking a step behind him without actually knowing why. All the time while they were walking, he kept looking back at her and giving her signs to continue following him. The Pakistani walked inside an old semi-derelict building that was attached to the Piraeus metro station ... or at least it seemed that way to her. Brigitte walked into a room with crumbling walls. The temperature inside was several degrees lower and this was quite refreshing. The Pakistani stopped at the edge of a crumbling wall and gestured to her with a smile to come closer. She moved towards him and he offered her his hand to help her get around the wall. Brigitte ended up in a derelict room with stairs leading to a basement. A Nigerian woman was sitting on a crooked windowsill next to another black man and was threatening through tears to jump out of the window. Brigitte stood still with her back against the wall, not knowing how on earth she had ended up there, and even less why she wasn't leaving. The Pakistani fell on his knees in front of her and gave her a sign with his hand to lift her dress. Slowly and shakily, she started lifting her dress, looking him straight in the eyes. He kept giving her signs with his hand to go on lifting. When she reached her knees, already impatient, the Pakistani shoved both his hands under her dress and swiftly pulled down her underpants. Brigitte just stood there petrified, not knowing how to

react. The Pakistani made another sign with his hand meaning that she should spread her legs apart. She moved one of her legs, but she couldn't move the other. All of a sudden, the Pakistani shoved one of his fingers in her vagina. Brigitte kept standing still, unable to feel anything in her confusion. The Pakistani pulled his finger out surprised, and the next time he shoved in two of his fingers. Brigitte's head rang with the words: "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis are unclean!". Her body stiffened even more and she could feel his nails grazing her as his long black and dirty fingers were delving deeper inside her. The woman's voice echoed in her head: "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis are unclean!" When his fingers pushed even deeper inside, she could feel her stomach clench. She had to repulse those black and dirty fingers. "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis are unclean!". Unable to endure his presence inside her anymore, she vomited, quite abruptly. The Nigerian woman sitting on the windowsill interrupted her threats and tears with a burst of laughter. "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis are unclean!" - these words resounded through Brigitte's head. And with every repetition of these sentences, Brigitte's urge to vomit repeated too. The Nigerian woman had by now jumped off the windowsill and was bent over laughing while staring at her at the same time. The Pakistani was trying to lift her up now. Brigitte pushed his arms away with her right shoulder, when he tried to touch it. Brigitte stood up straight and then ran frantically further inside the basement. The Nigerian woman was now howling with laughter. The Pakistani called after her. "The Pakistanis are filthy! The Pakistanis are unclean!"

Brigitte ran faster and faster. She stopped only when she came to a dark space that led nowhere. She was terrified. She searched for a way out. Some words came to her from the dark, words that resembled chanting. She walked in the direction of the source of these words. She saw some subdued light at the end of a corridor. When she reached the source of the light she saw a group of Nigerians sitting in a circle and performing some sort of ritual. A middle-aged Nigerian was sitting at the centre. Dressed in a red cloak with yellow stripes and wearing a cap made of the same material, he pulled several chickens out of a box and released them in the air in the middle of the circle. The chickens ran around frantically within the circle of people, who stared at them mesmerized. The man in the red cloak, who was most likely a tribal chief, judging by his clothes, grabbed one of the chickens, and holding it by the beak, spun it around. Then he tore its head off and used the blood that sprayed all over to mark his eyes and forehead. When he stood up to do the same to the people sitting in the circle, he raised his eyes to see Brigitte standing there and watching them. When he looked at her she screamed and ran in circles in the dark space until she tripped on the same stairwell she had used to come down. She climbed up the stairs and returned to the same room. The Nigerian woman was back

on the windowsill crying out her threats at the man who had by now given up on dissuading her. The Pakistani stood against one of the walls with his head resting on his chest, but when he spotted Brigitte he livened up and summoned her with his hand to come to him. The Nigerian woman was just about to jump, but when she saw Brigitte she burst out laughing again. Brigitte ran towards the exit, pushing away the Pakistani who was still summoning her. She could hear the Nigerian woman's laughter all the way to the exit and then a single pleading cry that ended with a thud. Brigitte ran to the port. When she arrived there, she saw Thomas snoozing on a bench. Wanting to leave the impression that everything was all right, she told him she had been looking for a restaurant near the port, somewhere where they could have lunch, but that none of the restaurants seemed suitable. Comfortably sprawled across the bench, Thomas seemed unaffected by her words. And when she saw that he was paying no attention to her, Brigitte took a sandwich out of her rucksack and wolfed it down. Her stomach was empty.

Her first attempt at infidelity thus came to a dismal end. It could have had a fatal conclusion, just like in those cases with which Brigitte had to deal in the courtroom.