



Adios, Cowboy

Olja Savićević Ivančević, Celia Hawkesworth (Translation)

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A gritty, breakneck debut novel by a popular Croatian writer of the country's "lost generation"

Dada's life is at a standstill in Zagreb—she's sleeping with a married man, working a dead-end job, and even the parties have started to feel exhausting. So when her sister calls her back home to help with their aging mother, she doesn't hesitate to leave the city behind. But she arrives to find her mother hoarding pills, her sister chain-smoking, her long-dead father's shoes still lined up on the steps, and the cowboy posters of her younger brother Daniel (who threw himself under a train four years ago) still on the walls.

Hoping to free her family from the grip of the past, Dada vows to unravel the mystery of Daniel's final days. This American debut by a poet from Croatia's "lost generation" explores a beautiful Mediterranean town's darkest alleys: the bars where secrets can be bought, the rooms where bodies can be sold, the plains and streets and houses where blood is shed. By the end of the long summer, the lies, lust, feuds, and frustration will come to a violent and hallucinatory head.

Adios, Cowboy Details

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From Reader Review Adios, Cowboy for online ebook

Marina Sofia says

An interesting, no-holds-barred and at times almost unbearably sad portrayal of the generation most affected by the war in Yugoslavia and trying to make a life after and in spite of it all. Yet, unexpectedly, the language and insights are not high-flown and dramatic, but rendered with a clear-eyed, almost cynical and mocking tone of a younger generation.

Joseph Schreiber says

A deeply personal piece of unfinished business draws Dada, the spirited heroine of Farewell, Cowboy, from the towers of Zagreb, back to the grimy streets of her hometown on the shores of the Adriatic in this debut novel from Croatian poet and writer Olja Savi?evi?. Once she arrives her first task is to relieve her older sister of the responsibility of keeping track of their mother who seems to be surviving on a routine of pharmaceuticals, soap operas and bi-weekly treks to the cemetery to visit the graves of her son and husband. But at the heart of Dada's return to the Old Settlement is a need to lay to rest her questions surrounding the suicide of her beloved younger brother Daniel several years earlier.

For complete review see:

<https://roughghosts.wordpress.com/201...>

Rebecca says

In summer 2009, Dada (aka Rusty) returns to her Croatian hometown to care for her mother, who, her sister reports, has become increasingly dependent on Valium, sleeping pills and alcohol. Back in Zagreb she'd been working as a photographer for a website that rips off other people's stories and sleeping with someone else's husband. Going home means abandoning that secondhand life and facing up to the fact of her brother's death – when he was 18 he threw himself under a train. “One has to sit down beside one's demon and mollify it until it's calm – that's all, perhaps, that can be done,” she muses.

Now for the title: Dada's late father, brother, and friends (“the Iroquois Brothers”) were all big on cowboys and Indians. Her father, who worked for The Balkan Cinema, was always on the cowboys' side, the presumed side of justice and honor. When news comes that a spaghetti western actor/director named Ned Montgomery will be passing through town, it causes Dada to think about her father and her brother and, what's more, about the workings of her own memory: “memory is the present of all remembered events. ... But memory is also the saboteur editor in the back room, cutting and pasting, reframing to the very end, or at least until Alzheimer's.”

I wasn't sure about the whole cowboy thing, especially a third-person omniscient interlude labeled “Western” (as opposed to Part One, “Eastern”), about Ned's misadventures in Croatia. Perhaps the cowboy movies' stereotypical standoff of races is meant to echo what happened in the former Yugoslavia not so long ago; “The advent of the war had a way of making people's ethnicity everybody's business,” Dada recalls. But overall the plot felt to me like a bit of a muddle: Dada goes some places, sees some people, talks and

thinks about her brother, helps her mother out a bit, and then declares “it’s time for me to ride off into the sunset” and gets back on a train.

Anyway, this was interesting in places and I liked some of the descriptive language, like “You’ll never get rid of the damp and woodworm, the stink of burned onions, or the kids on your steps.” The dialogue, however, sometimes seems coarse and unlearned – non-agreement of subject and verb, eliding some vowels, etc. (e.g. “Death don’t bother me none”). I guess it was the translator’s choice to try to convey the slangy level of the diction.

This was named the best Croatian novel of 2011. Savi?evi? is the author of six poetry collections and a story collection.

Thanks to McSweeney’s for sending a digital copy for review.

Magda says

Una voce giovane nel coro degli scrittori balcanici che non lascia indifferenti. La vicenda narrata è tragica, una ragazza che ritorna nel paese natale per assistere la mamma malata e ci ritorna dopo aver vissuto la tragedia di un fratello morto suicida. Un ritorno catartico quindi, scoprirà cose nuove sulla morte del fratello, farà pace con la sua voglia di vendetta e conoscerà meglio le persone che in gioventù aveva giudicato male. Scrittura ricca di salti temporali e ritmata.

Melissa says

Dada has grown up in a small town in Croatia from which she escaped as soon as she could at the age of eighteen. But she is drawn back to this bizarre town by the horrible suicide of her younger brother, Daniel. The book is told from Dada’s point of view and we are given information about her life and hometown as Dada remembers it. She speaks of memory being like a tape that “rolls forward and backwards. Fw-stop-rew-stop-rec-play-stop, it stops at important places, some images flicker dimly frozen in a permanent pause, unclear.” The narrative runs in the same way that Dada describes a tape: sometimes we get a passage that is an old memory and then all-of-sudden we are thrust into her present; Dada also likes to fast forward to her future and speculate on what she will do next.

The setting is a coastal town in Croatia which is hot, dirty and badly polluted. Dada’s own father died from an acute case of asbestos poisoning. People in the town, especially the children, love old westerns and when they were young, Dada and her brother Daniel act out scenes from the westerns they have watched at the local movie theater. Like a typical American western that takes place on the border between civilization and the vastly unorganized territory, Croatia at the time also occupies a space somewhere between civilization and a strange wilderness. The western theme is fitting for a place like Croatia which was torn apart by war in the Balkans and it is Dada’s generation that is still trying to recover from this conflict.

Dada describes many eccentric characters that she has known since childhood; many residents of this town that she calls the “Old Settlement” do not seem to conform to what most would consider normal social behavior. For example, her great-grandmother, who was a diabetic invalid, is described as the “insatiable one” because of her reputation for sex. Professor Herr, a neighbor of Dada’s family and the local vet, has his

home ransacked by a group of young people and he mysteriously disappears soon after. It also seems that he is the only one who has any answers about Daniel's mysterious and puzzling death.

The cowboy and western theme is further developed when a group of actors and extras show up to film a western-style movie. All of the extras hang around the Old Settlement with their big hats and belt buckles. Some of them even start shooting chickens with their pistols. Dada has a very brief and passionate affair with one of these extras named Angelo. It appears that Angelo also knew Dada's brother Daniel and although he denies it, he might have some knowledge about Daniel's mysterious death.

The final part of the book comes to a very fast-paced and dramatic conclusion. The circumstances of Daniel's death are revealed amidst a showdown between the fake cowboys and one of the eccentric villagers. I was not surprised to learn that this author is also a poet since many of the lines in this book blur the distinction between lyric and prose. In the end, we are reminded that cowboys, although a nice fantasy as a short distraction, are not real and that oftentimes there will never be a hero riding into town on that white horse. Sometimes the bad guys do win.

For more of my reviews please visit: www.thebookbindersdaughter.com

J.J. Amaworo says

Set in a dreary town on the Adriatic coast, the novel follows the heroine Dada as she tries to find out why her younger and much-loved brother Daniel threw himself under a train a few years earlier.

The tone of disillusionment and decay shrouds the book like a fog hanging over a sea: the country is recovering from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s; Dada is listless after a relationship breakdown; and her family is struggling to live with the trauma of Daniel's death.

The "plot" comes a distant second to the picaresque cast of characters and the language, and Savi?evi?'s background as a poet is evident in some of the beautiful imagery and descriptions of the decrepit town.

Overall, while the story is too diffuse for the novel to be called truly gripping, Savi?evi? writes with power and verve. Well done to Istros Books for bringing her work to English-speaking readers.

Full review on <https://jjawilson.wordpress.com/>

Jordan says

Honestly, I am blown away by the 3.79 grading that this book is receiving. Although Savicevic uses an abundance of words she never says anything. I could not tell you one thing that happened in this book. It was as if some very unremarkable person with an equally unremarkable life, pocket-dialed you and left a voicemail that was equivalent to 200+ pages. It felt like torture slogging through this.

I don't think I could convey how much I disliked this book. Just terrible. Awesome cover artwork, tho!

Ivo says

Ovo je posebna knjiga, dosta razli?ita od onog što sam ?itao u našoj produkciji. Mislim da se ne?e svidjeti onima koje vole Dana Browna i sli?nu literaturu, kao ni onima koji vole ?itati Tomi?a (bez da podcjenjujem). Evo kritike:

Evo kritike:

<http://www.e-novine.com/kultura/kultu...>

<http://www.mvinfo.hr/izdvojeno-kritik...>

Richard Wu says

I picked this up after reading an excerpt from the McSweeney's website, and because it had an interesting title.

I'm not quite sure if anything happens in this book. Though Savi?evi? uses many words, she conveys little. The characters are flat, archetypal, forgettable; whatever semblance of plot feels forced. Reading this sapped my energy - imagine the mental fog that accompanies getting out of bed in the morning, or wandering around in a literal fog and having no idea which direction is which. Is it an accomplishment that this deflected my mind to unrelated things even as I tried forcing it to concentrate?

On the plus side, some super witty sentences earn this an extra star.

Hana says

One sister's poetic and sometimes less poetic search for the meaning of her brother's intentional death - suicide. Voyage through the other side of the touristic mediterranean coastal town, through the places more distanced from the sea, but closer to the hills, stones, sidewalks, ground.

Neva says

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

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Anamarija says

oronuli ostaci djetinjstva, doma, obitelji i života jedne propale studentice, dio su sjajno ispri?ane štorije o mraku naših života i vremena u kojem živimo.

Anne says

In *Vaarwel, cowboy* ligt niets er te dik bovenop. Het is niet dat Olja Savi?evi? te schaars met woorden is, maar ze besteedt ze in elk geval niet aan leed. Ze weigert om sentiment aan te wakkeren, en om te verdwalen in de psyches van haar personages. Misschien doet ze dat omdat er teveel bronnen van leed zijn in *Vaarwel, cowboy*. Het hoofdpersonage Dada keert terug naar haar wijk in Split, die de ravage van de oorlog in de jaren '90 nooit echt te boven is gekomen. Ze beschrijft het als een troosteloze, te hete, sjofele badplaats. Ze is teruggekomen omdat haar moeder daas door haar dagen heen zweeft, verslaafd geraakt aan pillen na de zelfmoord van haar jongste zoon, Dada's broertje Danijel. Het is Dada nooit helemaal duidelijk geworden hoe hij tot zijn daad is gekomen, en dat is deels de reden voor haar terugkomst: ze wil haar pijn niet verminderen (dat zou niet eens kunnen) maar het in een vorm gieten die het misschien zou kunnen verklaren. Dat zij dit in de laatste bladzijden pas opbiecht aan een wildvreemde, zegt eigenlijk ook al genoeg.

Zoals ik al zei: meer dan genoeg leed. Maar deze roman gaat niet over leed.

Savi?evi? beschrijft eigenlijk alles behalve het leed: alles eromheen, in plaats van de rauwe pijn die Danijels dood heeft achtergelaten. En mede dat maakt het zo'n sterke roman. Je voelt de zinding van de hete maar niet warme zomer, de hardheid van Dada's zus, en de vervallenheid van de wijk, en alles samen draait om die

ene gebeurtenis, vier jaar voor het begin van het boek.

Het is geen vrolijke roman, hoewel het af en toe wel echt grappig is. Het is geen liefdevolle roman: Dada en haar familieleden voelen zich ongemakkelijk bij nauw contact, en er is ook geen ruimte voor romantische liefde. En toch is het geen enorm zware roman. Savi?evi? jaagt haar zinnen op: er is een rusteloosheid die door het boek dwaalt. Er is geen ruimte om te lang bij de dingen stil te staan; we moeten weer door. Dat is het gevoel dat ik kreeg bij de structuur van het boek, en dat lijkt perfect te passen bij de inhoud: langzame reflectie zou misschien te pijnlijke resultaten opleveren.

En dan is er nog het cowboy-thema. Dada's overleden vader en broer waren gek op spaghetti westerns, en in Dada's jeugd speelde zij met de kinderen in de buurt, nu volwassen of dood, dat ze cowboys en indianen waren. Het paste goed in de verhaallijn, vind ik. De cowboy filmster Ned Montgomery komt in film opnemen en Split, en dit rakelt de thematiek uit Dada's jeugd weer op. Ook laat het zien dat helden uit een jeugd nooit hun verwachtingen waar kunnen maken bij een gedesillusioneerde volwassene. En op (naar mijn idee) geheel western-achtige wijze, begint het verhaal met een aankomst, en eindigt het met een vertrek.

Vatroslav Herceg says

Algoritam

Zagreb, 2010.

Knjiga je podijeljena na tri dijela; 1. "Eastern", 2. "Western" te 3. "Adio".

Jezik je iznimno aktualiziraju?i. Razigran, maštovit, otka?en u tom smislu posjeduje marinkovi?evsku energiju. Tekst vrvi neologizmima, regionalizmima te majstorski izvedenim urbanim vernakularom. ?est je krnji infinitiv koji doprinosi vernakularnosti i opuštenosti u tekstu. Sljede?i primjeri vernakulara; "Zaspala bi pred upaljenim teveom...", "Danijel se poslije smije, kaže- Šta vam je, samo sam se zafrkava. Da vidim ko ?e me spasit.", "Balkanjerosima". Idu?i primjer bio bi primjer hapaksa, ja bar nisam nikada prije a ni ranije susreo ovu rije?, a zbilja je kul i pokušat ?u od nje iznjedriti neologizam; "vrago?anstvena". Prostote doprinose ugo?aju svakodnevice; "Ne kur?i se, rekli bi u Starom Naselju." Svojevrnsni sintakti?ki paralelizmi se javljaju pri ponavljanju odre?enih kratkih odlomaka teksta; "Moja je soba kutija u ku?i kutiji." Ova re?enica se javlja uzastopce dva puta na po?etku novog potpoglavlja koje je uvijek nenaslovljeno i neozna?eno. Drugi primjer svojevrsnog sintakti?kog paralelizma, ima ih još no ne?u sve baciti- nisam lud, je sljede?i; "Zagreb je ostao iza mene kao najdalji grad na svijetu, dalji od Osake i Juneana i Santa Fea." U svakom slu?aju autorica je o?ito vodila veliku brigu o tekstu.

Sastavni dijelovi teksta su pisma, mejlovi te grafiti (Stran?e, ovdje te zakon ne štiti).

Radnja je onaj faktor koji je ovo djelo razdvojio od ozvjezdije?nja u vidu ?etvorke ili petice. Vrijeme radnje su nulte, mjesto je jedno dalmatinsko naselje.

Narator je homodijegetski pripovjeda? u vidu likuše, bar u prvom dijelu, dok se kasnije javlja i pripovjeda? u tre?em licu gdjegdje. Likuša-naratorica stalno retardira radnju svojim retrospekcijama, sve se vrti oko njenog unutarnjeg svijeta. Njen unutarnji svijet je dosadan. Njeno ime je Dada a nadimak "Ruzinava". Tekst povremeno ipak ostvaruje sadržajne poene kada zakucava socijalno stanje Sanaderove Hrvatske;

"I tako stigla sam. Da stigla! Ja sam se vratila u taj grad. Koji je golema ropotarnica, blato i maslinici, divota prašine, ve?er na zapuštenoj terasi hotela Ilirija, teški metali u zraku, izmet i borovina, ma?ka i klizava riblja krljušt na masnom brodskom navozu i more zategnuto sve do studenog, kad zapušu lebi?i.

Na putu prema doma, trgova?ki centri i šume jumbo plakata, tundra i tužne prizemnice na cesti, ali prije toga prolazim kroz osvjetljena šetalista, dolje su kruzeri, u putni?koj luci, vodi?i s rukom podignutom u vis ispred kolona japanskih i ameri?kih staraca s protezama i tupeima, kockarnice, blagi vjetri hašiša, vonj tijela i parfema, acid, trans, folk, Saint Tropez, Monte Carlo, Cista Provo, belle dame sains merci, cure na visokim

potpeticama u tegnute u bijeli najlon i životinjske kože, obrijani momci koji zveckaju ključevima ulaštenih automobila, ruke im, dok im dodiruju lice, mirišu na znoj i genitalije, na novac i duhan."

Mogli ste primijetiti također i jednu tekstualnu referencu; "divota prašine".

No da se vratim na radnju. Sam kraj, dolazak Ned Montgomerya i Teda u Staro Naselje te dvostruko ubojstvo Marije i Anđela, je tako izlizano i jadno da je to preloše. Drugi likovi su bijedno okarakterizirani, Danijel te Karlo Šain su trebali biti prikazani daleko potpunije jer ovako djeluju poput likova dječje priče. Olja je vrhunska u jeziku a katastrofalna u naraciji i radnji. Bar u ovom djelu.

Jake Goretzki says

An odd, rather patchworky little novel - part Dalmatian coming of age, then a peculiar switch to Ned Montgomery filming a cowboy film (or maybe I was too distracted this week).

Some fine observations of Balkan living and neighbourhood life (I love the line about their fathers being 'men with heart attacks in their chests'). Pretty seamless translation from SSEES legend Celia Hawksworth - give or take a few oddities (not sure about her use of the Geordie-or-Belfast-sounding 'yous').

The pull quotes from reviewers on the back of the UK edition are odder still. One tweet called Max Liu in the Independent says "...shows globalisation exploiting the cultural vacuum created by war..." - which displays a stunning ignorance of place (Yugoslavs watched Western movies, listened to rock and roll and read Italian comic books in translation for 40 years before that war, you fucking moron. 'Globalisation', for fuck's sake). A curiosity.
