



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

(SELF)TRANSLATION AND CENSORSHIP:

A STUDY BASED ON DIARIES OF JASMINA TEŠANOVIĆ

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APPENDIX IV

NORMALITY: A MORAL OPERA BY A POLITICAL IDIOT

AND

MATRIMONY

COURTESY OF JASMINA TEŠANOVIĆ

ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS WRITTEN IN 1998-2000

Normality: A Moral Opera by a Political Idiot

Text by Jasmina Tesanovic

Photos by Stephanie Damoff

March 17th, 1998

I tremble, my feet tremble while I am asleep. I feel like the heroine victim in the “White Hotel”: why do my legs tremble as if an energy is passing through them in circles? Will I need my legs to run away, and fail to run away? I fear death and killing. I fear being unable to imagine any future, not even a lunch which I could enjoy. I watch my child with a sense of guilt: I, with this destiny of trembling legs, was in no position to have children. To make them victims. Being here in Serbia, being here in the eighties, nineties. I should have been sensible enough to realize that I shouldn’t have children. No future, no peace. When I was pregnant, in the eighties, we didn’t have electricity for days. It was winter, and Tito had just died. Tito had always been telling us we had a lot of electricity, we were a rich country, we were the best in the world, between East and West. I believed him, I liked his face, I remember him ever since I was born. I thought he was my grandfather. Once I was supposed to give him flowers as a little girl but then they made me give flowers to President Nasser of Egypt, because I was taller, and Tito was smaller, and Nasser was taller and the other girl was smaller.

Since then I always thought being small is a question of privilege and beauty I grew up abroad, my mother is a pediatrician who stopped working to follow my father’s career, an engineer who become a businessman. At first she was depressed but then she got used to it, she had me, but when I started going to an English boarding school she got asthma. And she got used to it too: her solitude and her asthma. We lived in Egypt and we lived in Italy: I went to a British school, spoke Serbian at home and the world around me spoke first Arab and then Italian. It was more than a schizophrenia, every day I switched from and into three languages, three cultures...and as my mother I got used to it. Only many years later I managed to turn this painful Babylon in my head into a privilege. As my father claimed I should.

My legs tremble as if I were an old woman. When I was a kid, my legs used to tremble, but

then, I knew nothing about life, wars. I was just a sad kid in pain.

March 20th, 1998

It has been a terrible month, especially the past few weeks. The killing has started again, this time in Kosovo. Again we are witnesses who cannot see. We know it is going on, but we are blind. I have no idea if I should do something. It is not even the killing that makes me die every day little by little, it is this indifference to killing that makes me feel as if nothing matters in my life. It is not important if we write or don't write. It is not important if even we do see, if we move, if we try to make things better, or if we just kill, destroy and go on with our selfish animal being. My whole life is in crisis: I see no point to it. I belong to a country, to a language, to a culture which doesn't give a damn for anybody else and for whom nobody gives a damn. And I am completely paralyzed because I am not used to fighting, I am not used to killing. I don't believe anybody anymore, not even myself. I have stayed here and I have made a mistake: victim or not I have become part of those who did nothing for themselves or for the others they love. I hear my parents and their nonsense. They are old, maybe senile, but they have destroyed my freedom, my strength and taken away the power of my youth. It is my parents I am fighting. Once again the enemy is in me, part of me. And I have a feeling that I will not survive. I am trembling on the edge of insanity, and nothing and nobody is there to help me.

March 22nd, 1998

Isn't it funny, today I could feel OK if only I hadn't experienced a week ago the horror I did. And it was because of the California fitness vitamins I've been taking. I wonder, is it possible that a whole nation is using vitamins for years which make me crazy after only two days? I wanted to jump out of my skin, I felt drugged with useless, mindless energy, I went out and walked into the snow and rain without a coat. Only after that energy went out of me I felt like myself again, even though weak and sick, as I felt before taking the vitamins. Is it Europe versus America, or is it me, alone against world powers, against the world as it is? Now I take tea, chamomile and a little bit of good food per day. No diets, no ambitions related to diets, looks, health. The only way to stay sane is to stay in your human, natural shape, related to you and your age. And that is not easy with America demanding and imposing inhuman standards. Useless, my life still seems rather useless, except for a few details: some people sometimes read a book of mine and feel good. Then I

feel useful, or perhaps just not useless. Otherwise, I wonder, if every life is as superfluous and useless as mine, what makes the world go round, why are children born. And then I realize that in my script, life was always elsewhere, as were talent, success, money. In my script, I was prohibited to live and succeed: my parents and my country didn't want it. They forbade us to be individuals, successful, different. They were afraid all the time and we were supposed to inherit that fear. We really and truly did. At least I did. I am waiting for bombs, I am waiting for punishment, and my strength is in my resistance, my survival.

I spent last evening with three beautiful young women; so kind, so happy, who knows why, maybe because no hopes are yet shattered. They cannot be shattered at their age. No war or injustice can shatter hopes of those who haven't lived yet. Just like my child who is only thirteen. And they looked up to me: they would like to be me in twenty years. They cannot see my fears, my anxiety, my shattered inner self. They think I am wise, beautiful and sincere. And so I was. Like a medium I become what I am with, be it good, be it bad, be it something I want, or not. I was fine last night. We laughed about sanctions, about the war, about our destiny as people who have to flee. Because we know that we are bound to leave and try a new life or just become one of the rest, in order to survive. And my husband said: every country has its terrible political and social atmospheres, its terrible people, and people run away from the people they are born into. And that is true, except that here today, there is no place to run, except to others who are as oppressive, as low as these you are running away from. I know that despair from my first exile and I fear that choice. I was in Vienna, in 92, waiting for Belgrade to be bombed also by the country I was hosted. I had only one choice, to be a Serb, whatever that meant in Austria, a country whose language I couldn't understand. In Italy it was even worse: I could understand too well that I had to be a bad Serb responsible for the war atrocities and guilty for not stopping them. And that would make me become a nationalist as most people who live in exile are.

March 24th, 1998

Hey, what is normality if not this philosophical approach to normality. I cannot wash dishes without being philosophical about it: is it the last time I am washing dishes? Will I have to wash dishes in exile the rest of my life to survive? And is it a worthy choice, at my age, with my royal background? And is this how life becomes interesting, because of its ups and downs, because of its ruins and not because of its continuity and peace? When I had my baby, I couldn't buy diapers, I couldn't buy baby food, even maternity hospitals didn't have cotton and medicines. We had to get them on our own from abroad. This was before the war. The war came, the sanctions, and we had operations without narcotics, without medicines. We didn't need an outer war to understand our invisible everyday war with standards of normality we had once. What really terrorizes me is the fact that every second everything is moving, and actually nothing is visibly happening to me. My will is not respected. I am catatonic, I am fighting against the times with my back thrust against the future. A hurricane has swept me off my feet, above the ground and I am moving fast and blind, curled up in my women's body with my back towards the future. That is how I feel. And I see people walking, people running, jogging, and driving fast cars, choosing to live fast. That's not me, that has nothing to do with me. I am thrust by bad weather into bad weather, the hurricane is my home, the hurricane is my vehicle, the hurricane is my language. And my future is unknown, harsh and invisible. Only the back of my head is facing it, with the eyes of my back safely closed. If I could only become the wind and be no more. . .

March 25th, 1998

I feel as if my amniotic liquid has run out of my cosmos. I am drying, suffocating without love, security, and strong and definite or blinding emotions. I am not brave, I am not happy, I have no opinions. That is not normality, that is keeping out of life and events that do not take you into account. I don't take them in, they don't take me in. My future is a wall very close to my face, my past is an abyss. So, I am learning to dance in place, to dance with my mind. They say the mind never dies, well I think the mind dies first, if you are harassed. So to preserve the mind one must defend everything that that mind is made of. But what is that? Is it freedom, is it love, is it beauty? Is it democracy, is it compassion, is it art? Or is it something else all together, an invisible center, an endlessly rotating ball

of energy. I don't know where that ball is. I don't know where I am: the outside overtakes the inside by force. I am fighting to save my inside for a better time. Today, they speak again about sanctions: I don't bother to think what will become of us, I have a feeling that I am feeding a bundle of men escaping from mobilization, anyway, for the past few years. I am nurturing, I am protecting, I am not thinking. I don't have time to think of justice. I was deprived of it as a woman, a long time ago and my inside fears for sheer survival are at this moment raging. I must survive.

March 27th, 1998

Moral opera is the title of my rambling, even though it is the 21st century. Is Leopardi postmodern, even though he wrote his moral opera in the 19th century? And anyway what do I care for postmodernity? It doesn't care for my moral dilemmas, and that is why I have to be more moral than the Pope. I don't have a soul anymore, it is shattered in thousand pieces. In its place is a diamond with sharp cutting edges: its edges make my stomach bleed, nearly all the time, as I move, as I think. But the diamond shines, sometimes only for me, sometimes for everybody through me. It depends on the light and visibility. The war is going on and we are politically correct, we are not moral, nobody is, especially the peace makers. I have seen it in Bosnia, in Croatia and now in Serbia, which is supposedly my country. Americans are being Americans and politically correct, which is painful for everybody else who is not American and is politically correct in a different way. Americans don't get it, we have a different idea of everyday life, of food, of emotions, of help, we victims, we aggressors. And intruding American help is something we perceive as really helping the self identity for the big American politically correct nation. And we, victims and aggressors know that the Americans in many ways are right. We would all like to be Americans, but it is impossible. The Americans don't want us to be Americans, they want us to be the Other, a territory where new things can be implemented. I don't like myself speaking this way. Here in Serbia, today and for the past few years I had the high morals of a 'traitor'. I defend foreigners, Americans, foreign intervention against national barbarians. But I don't like to be the Other to anybody, least of all to the biggest power in the world, being a member of the smallest power in the world. Isn't that unfair?

Now, my moral issue is to survive, and to tell the truth about my death. I thought of writing a theoretical book, a philosophical book, or a simple fiction book like Carver. But I am too

anxious, my world of words is made of everyday anxieties, tragedies, news, lack of money, food and love among people. The other night my neighbors wrecked my prewar luxury car because they are envious. They did it openly saying that they lost their cars, why should I have mine. I am aware I will have to fight back, to stand up in their face and scream, you are vandals, you are not justice makers. You are lost. No law, no police, no force can protect me, they don't exist anymore, and besides, they wouldn't protect me because I am a woman with a luxury car. Women should only have men with cars and luxury cars are protected with guns, today in center of Belgrade. My neighbor is a poor alcoholic who didn't adapt to the new ways of making money through crime. He lost his money, his mind and he is drinking beer all day on the pavement. He is not a good man, he is not a bad man, he is not a hobo or an ex citizen, he is one of the thousand pavement people, or dustbin people who live in the postmodern society of Serbia, based on moral and physical decay. And he is not alienated, he is in touch emotionally and rationally. He understands the New Order and he is following it. We are both part of the New Poor Class. The only thing that divided us was my car parked on the pavement where he drinks his beer. And he tried to do away with that symbol that divides us. I understand that and I won't try to explain to him that cars shouldn't be scratched, knifed and spat upon. He has suffered even worse, why shouldn't my car? And the criminal on the other side of the street, with the big red racing car is watching us sternly: it goes without saying, we know, he knows, everybody knows, his car is not going to be touched in this city. His car carries a gun.

March 27th, 1998

The silence of our Fathers, the lies of our Fathers and their games, fifty years after. It is my life too, part of theirs, yes, as you wish, less important, less true, but I need to know. The Truth. I know there is no such thing as truth, but tell me your truth without serving it up as a Truth for Kids, for those who never ought to know the deeds of their Fathers, for those who need to tell the story forever and preserve the Bible. My parents may die tomorrow, but I never heard from them what really happened. They are heroes, they speak the speech of heroes, all these years, and I am a failed hero. A fallen hero, I failed my duty, I invalidated their education. They are ashamed of me, they still love me but not as they used to, with their blood, pride and tissue. They don't want grandchildren from me, fame or

socializing, because of the fear of evil spreading. Well, those parents never cried, never held hands, never told me how hunger and killing can be horrible. And I am certain they did cry, hold hands and suffer the war. I am a coward, they tell me, so they will never tell me the truth. My mother never told me how painful childbirth is, because I was a coward, I was afraid of pain. I heard many years later that she screamed giving birth, she made scandals, she wanted to give up the life of her baby. That was me, hey. I never screamed, I was alone and suffering, because I was afraid to show what they knew. That I was a coward. An unheroic person, a female person, that is what I am. A fragile, suffering, neurotic little person, dedicated to avoiding pain and suffering, who wants only laughter, joy and good fantasies. They believe, my parents who want their dreams to come true through me, that such people cannot make a dream come true. Such people are fools, court jesters and poets. Such people should not rule or ever be told the truth. Because I didn't want to fight any war, because I never wore high heels, because I never believed in the One Truth, they will never tell me Their Story. What else could I want from them: they are only my parents. Not money, not glory, not power, I wanted their simple truthful story of their lives, of my life. They don't talk, they don't write. I do it for them, with love and hate, with the impotence of a disavowed and abused generation. Sometimes I sing and mock their story. They just look at me with blank eyes. They really don't care for cowards who don't want to fight any war, who believe there is no such thing as a just war. It is they who fought all these Balkan wars, new and old. It's their power and ideas which made people die, which made those ridiculous leaders who advocate old death. Death is everywhere about here. It is in the life more than in the death, in people who breathe more than in people who have ceased to breathe. I don't blame politics and leaders anymore for wars and tragedies: it is all the rest who make these leaders possible. And that includes me too, and my powerlessness to get the truth out of my parents.

March 31st, 1998

It is the end of my birthday month, a terrible month it has been. Many old fears have sprung up: pregnancy fears of normality and abnormality. Listen everybody, my mind doesn't serve anybody, it is too sensitive, too defensive, too personal. I don't care anymore about my future. I must preserve my present, understand my past. My future I give to my children. I am afraid of it because I remember the time I believed in the future, and I look at myself now, twenty years later: I have lost my language, I have lost my country, I have

lost my legitimacy, my past and my future. I fight, stuck in the present, to survive. No love or hope warms my present, it is freezing. The new world is freezing, I have become old and unhappy, and nothing makes me smile. Except for the sun. You know, once I was a beauty, even if I didn't know it then. But my beauty shone as a star and people related not to my person but to my beauty. I believed that I was my beauty and I related to my beauty as well. Now my beauty is gone and nobody really cares about my words, as they never did. I don't care about my words because I lost my beauty. And then, a dwarf told me: you will never lose your beauty! We shine, on and on, with our birth marks, don't worry. I am worried, I am terribly sad and worried. I don't watch the news, I don't read newspapers, and still I know what is going on. How can I stop the horrible world from reproducing itself? By ignorance, by silence. I even lost my beauty, as the world lost peace. Dictators love pretty animals and scented flowers for that reason.

April 2nd, 1998

The world is around us but we are not part of it. We are surrounded by “civilization” but caged in by it like wild animals. We are the zoo. Here they say, we are a heavenly nation. As such there is no proper place for us on earth. I feel the wire around us in visas, foreign rude policemen, lawless custom-officers. A few years ago, at the Hungarian border they took money away from us without an explanation. They took with a smile chocolates we bought for our children (they were very young customs officers) and they swore at me because I dared to look at the computer screen they held in front of me. I said nothing, happy to be let go, and they said, if you have anything to say, ask for the International Community. We were outcasts, no laws could reach us. The World inside the Cage creates a specific sort of domesticated wild animal. And then it goes out into the Big World, the Big Bad World, the Big Free World, where are no laws for the Wild World. That is democracy, that is Normality. My instincts are dead inside my cozy cage: my food is right in front of me, I have no ambitions other than survival and inner freedom and truth. As if I were part of a Universe, a small grain, spot or light and I have to shine and keep moving all the time to sustain the universe. People outside the cage, where I have often been, live a different life: they have a human life, they have a community of their own with its specific aggressive and assertive rules. They are not grains of light in the Universe as are we intellectuals and artists from the zoo. Here is the world too, I say to my children, don't consider the world to be an outside phenomenon. You with your inner selves are the world

too, you are caryatids of the universe, captured and invisible and buried in yourselves. Your superfluous energy will fly back to the sky or earth to people who are free and fight and need it, and you will stay on in your place as a root. Who knows? They may give us flowers some day.

April 7th 1998

In the way our violent dictator put the upcoming referendum, do we want foreigners to rule us or not, the abuse he is inflicting on all of us is exposed. I am a doubting person: I don't know dictators, I don't know Serbs, I don't know what daily politics is. I know that I always wonder about good intentions which are not clear from the start. His destructiveness I feel as my self destructiveness. The fact that I cannot stand up to him, nor me nor my fellowmen. But then, they tell me, it is money, it is power, it is the good life that it is all about. And simply, that is exactly what we all lost, besides the criterion of "normality," and exactly what he gained that he couldn't gain in "normal" life and conditions, that is, through work and fair competition. So my normality is in his hands, he is using it as only his normality. In order to feel normal and good he needs all of us to suffer. I know the script, I have seen it in everyday life on a small scale. Is it as simple as this? We have an immature, spoiled, savage person who keeps us in this cage, burning fire all around us, hiding us from the mirror like Cinderella in ashes, convincing us that we are the Wild Serbs we are not, falsifying our thoughts, roles, wishes, history. Is he a simple-minded wicked stepmother and we angels, or are we part of his essence, responsible for his power and resistance?

We are drafted into a war we don't understand and don't want by cowards who are afraid to negotiate because they cannot speak or be rational. Is one gun, one armed man enough to guide one thousand people to death? I remember a picture from World War II, a single soldier guiding to the gas chamber hundreds of people sticking together, afraid to unglue themselves from one another. If one runs, he will die, but if only everybody ran at the same time, nobody would die. If only somebody snatched the gun from his hand! Our dictator is brandishing a wooden spoon. He is too much of a coward to carry a gun. He acts for himself while we are spectators in a cage. I consider myself to be a political idiot. Idiot was the word in ancient Greece which denoted common people without access to knowledge and information: all women by definition and most men. I consider myself unable to judge,

to choose, I see no options I can identify with. Is that normal? Is it because I am a woman? Is it a state of normality for a woman not to be able to identify or judge political options? All the political options of my fellowman sound aggressive, strange, stupid or farfetched to my language of concrete needs: I need to move, I need to communicate, I need to have children, I need to talk, to play, to have fun. They don't talk about that, they speak of history, of historical needs and rights. That is not my history. If it was, it wasn't me who made that history. They talk of blood, of breed, of pride, of rights, of visions. But I am in need, I am terribly in need. I am losing my mind because of a lack of love and understanding, because of a lack of fun and laughter and lightness. I cannot think 24 hours a day about fear and imminent death. Thinking about death is enough death. Real death is just a physical sensation that my mind may miss. For we here today, it is a culture of death, based on instincts of dying or surviving. I don't want to have to listen to my instincts every moment. I want to control and command my basic instinct in order to feel free and well. Is that normality? I lost it a long time ago and so gradually that I can hardly remember when and how. It was an invisible loss of an invisible category. I miss it, I know it existed even though I cannot prove it anymore to anybody here.

April 14th, 1998

Yesterday I jumped onto a bus, a terrible, stinking, falling apart bus. I embarked on a trip dangerous from several points of view: people were hanging out the door which couldn't close, others were going through our pockets to make a living, and many old sick people who cannot afford to buy medicine were coughing and spitting on everybody. Aleksandar Tisma said that spitting is a macho marking of territory in Serbia. If it were a matter of physiology, women would spit too. But then, women in the country do spit, just like men, it is the urban women who don't spit whilst urban men still do. At the beginning of the war with Croatia, we had night drafts, we had sanctions, we had no food or medicine, and we feared that we might be bombed by NATO forces. It wasn't a visible war: it was a war in our minds and materially we were kept outside the battlefield. But it was a situation which one could bear, thinking: we are all here still, if we leave we will give our city or country to those who are making the war in order to make us leave. But then, I said, is this my life, will this developing situation be the life of my children? And I thought, as if it were very important: will my daughter spit on the street? If I ever leave my country it will be because I cannot stand the spitting, whatever it means. Shooting, yes, but not spitting.

Riding on the bus, I realized I was surrounded by the young faces of schoolgirls: they were tender, happy and very pretty. They were ballet dancers coming back from a very successful show they had performed. Their parents were somewhere around, gray and tired and worried, just as I was. Young, old people, gone half-crazy with fear and worry looking after these happy beautiful girls. My God, you cannot stop beauty, you cannot stop joy, you cannot stop creativity. And these young goddesses will never know how pretty or talented they are if they stay stuck in a closed city riding a macho bus. But their joy cannot be stopped. Their faces were beaming, their arms and legs were long and thin as if they were Africans. Their language was urban, but sharp and soft, as if they were from another century when women grew up secluded and educated away from life and men in convents. And then I thought of women in ancient Greece or Egypt, their invisible lives that I have been dreaming of while writing my new novel. Their laughter when washing together by the river, their childbearing with secret fathers, their cruel deaths as punishment for daring to be free as men. And I looked through the window at downtown Belgrade, full of young and joyous boys and girls on a Saturday night with preposterous lives, with the same shoes, the same jackets, just as in New York or Paris. Now I know: some are criminals and some parents starve in order to make them look like that. But in either case, you cannot stop joy and beauty in time or place. It just grows faster than crime and death. It sure does.

April 15th, 1998

What a lovely date, I don't know why, maybe because in two days will be the birthday of Karen Blixen. Once I used to celebrate the birthdays of my beloved dead who make my life possible in some other space, in some other time. Now we are stuck in the present like in a drop of oil, every second lasts centuries, painfully and meaningfully. Changes are so frequent in my life, in this territory called the Balkans, that change is the rule. The art of living is that of adaptability, of cracking the new codes, of lawbreakers. . . of survivors. Every few months the value of money and goods changes and needs change because of the shortages, assigning a new system of values. No philosophy can last longer than the philosophy of needs. Today I saw a Serbian family in the road in front of the UNHCR office, near my flat, in the center of this new and old city. They were terrified, they had bags and suitcases around them blocking the sidewalk. A middle-aged woman was crying, a young girl was ashamed to look back at us who were looking at them, and the men were just sitting and staring in front of them. Men often do that when they become powerless. I

shivered at the sight. They were in my city, in my street. As I expected they were part of my story of our common destiny: Serbian refugees from Kosovo. Were they ever nationalists committed to power, or just victims of others' prejudices? My aunt, some twenty years ago, had to emigrate from Kosovo with all her family because as Serbs they were harassed by the Albanians. They left all their goods, they sold their house at a loss and started life anew here on the outskirts of Belgrade. That is the common story of my father's family, they are from Herzegovina, scattered all over the world, very successful in survival and abruptly changing destinies. I never belonged to them, I was brought up by my mother's family, an old Serbian family, but I didn't belong to them, either. They believed in God and traditions. I thought the first were violent and the second decadent. I belonged to my passions and fantasies made up by Karen Blixen, Italo Calvino, fairies. The family on the road reminded me of many families I have seen on the road in the past years, though not many came to Belgrade. This time, they will all come to Belgrade. They are not many, but that is why they will, because Belgrade made them lose their lives. My city will change once more. I doubt it is my city anymore, I am a refugee in my city like those refugees in the road. My room is just a road, I don't feel safe, happy or free. My back is turned towards no future, the light doesn't make me happy, it frightens me: I am afraid that my difference may show.

My mother as a communist refused the life of her father whom she considered a kulak, I refuse my mother's culture whom I consider a fanatic, my child is burning bridges with me because I am a traitor and she believes in national values. We have no continuity of values except treason against values. An old lady I know burned her own library, before World War II, risking her life because she was a communist and her library was made of "dirty" money. She burned the whole house by mistake, the house of her father. And she never said sorry or felt sorry. The only tradition is that of utter refusal and break. Even small family objects are thrown away, given away, valuable or not, in order to erase, to forget, to make a free space. Is that a possible ground to live on, tectonic, burning, volcanic?

April 16th, 1998

A month after my first painful entry, my breakdown, the beginning of this last war. Sanctions are nearly certain. Some say, we had them once, now we know what it is all about; some say, I cannot make it again. Most, decent people, say: we don't live here.

Now, some have left, some have stayed behind, but most people who didn't leave also didn't stay behind; they simply don't live here, don't belong here, whatever that here is. We live in an outer space of our inner life, an imaginary, virtual reality: maybe we have become the heavenly people the nationalists claim we are. Unaware, weak, hungry, frightened, and weak again, we are people in a concentration camp without the will or need to be elsewhere. I am afraid of the Big World, they will use me and abuse me in a different way than they do here. Here I am invisible, slowly dying. As long as I stay silent they leave me alone, me and my dog, who will stay behind to keep me company. The strongest have left, the best, and when they come back, we won't be the same anymore, and they too, will not be anymore the strongest or the best. The destiny of this country is to fall apart and the destiny of people here ever since the country has existed is to leave and return because life here wasn't possible. Only the guards stayed behind: soldiers and guards. Life was possible only for soldiers and guards.

April 18th, 1998

Tomorrow is Orthodox Easter or something like it. Everybody is celebrating something they never used to. They are faking religion, faking normality. For how long can one fake something that belongs to truth and justice, to the soul, to the inner diamond of one's life? I wanted to shout: fake no more, I cannot follow you anymore. I wanted to shout at the TV, to my sick communist mother who is baking traditional food and who invokes communism and war when we speak about Kosovo, in the face of my innocent child who doesn't want to know anything about history or politics because she knows somebody will suffer. She puts her hands over her ears remembering the heavy fights over nationalism we had in the family when she was very small: whether to leave or not to leave the country. But I cannot utter a word, I am dumb because I am faking something too. I am faking my normality, pretending that we need a normal everyday life with the good old values of friendship, loyalty and sisterhood. But when you look in the eyes of those people from whom you are expecting an understanding you see a pair of frightened, crazy eyes giving you the look of a maniac. The doctors look like the patients, we suffer the same disease of loss of nerves, tolerance and faith. The reduction of human life to sheer life. Today I saw old people hunting the postman for their voting lists. The people on pensions are threatened to vote "yes" in order to get their pensions, in order to be able to buy bread and maybe something else. And they are hunting the postman who represents the state, the power: a nice person,

our postman. He says, don't worry guys, *I'll* be there, just you be there. The result of our referendum is already public, it is in the air: nobody dares to alter the idea of the Big Brother and his artistic vision of the murals where our personal lives are scattered like cheap artist's paint.

April 19th, 1998

Today is Orthodox Easter. A Ukrainian chemist I met the other night, who lives and works in Brighton, England, said to me: Slavic people stick together, we are brothers. I thought, I am a sister, first things first. But then the look on his face didn't encourage me to go on. I was amazed that he knew the political cliché that I considered to be local patriotic propaganda: that the Russians are backing the Serbs. Because it is not so, nobody is backing the Serbs, why should they, it is like backing the bad part in you. My very sensitive young friend from Iowa City writes to me: I didn't dream of you having any problems in Belgrade, here we only hear about Albanians in Kosovo, never about the other side. Other side, I thought, is there something like an Other side in this policy of Nationalism? The Other side is a non-national, non-ethnic side and that is, then, an invisible side. My friend offers help or comfort: her humanitarian instincts arise from my pathetic letters. I hate that, but I have to write, in order to stay normal, in order to understand if there is such a thing as normality. I don't care if I am right or wrong, good or bad, pathetic or convincing. This is not literature, this is life. A friend from St. Louis desperately wants to come here and see for himself what is going on. I think his attitude is honest and right. And he is not thinking of us as a place where you can make a career as some American journalists do. He wants to come here because it is Europe, because it is white people, behaving differently from other white people in Europe: there are no blacks and still they construct colors. My friend from New York will come to make photographs on Normal life; this morning I couldn't buy milk. Just as six years ago when the war started, it started with milk, a symbol of maternal need. The message is: death to the children. A friend from Tuzla phoned me the other day, surprised that we had any problems. We spoke the same language as we always did, but I felt that she was a foreigner, living abroad. She didn't. She invited me to emigrate to Bosnia. It occurred to me that I was a Serb and that life would be difficult for me there, though it doesn't occur to me that I am a Serb here and that life is difficult here for all of us. I can cope with that more easily.

April 21st, 1998

A few years ago a corpse was found in a trash container on my street, Molerova Street, in my trash container. It was a corpse in bits and pieces, found by a gypsy drunkard who lives

in the basement of my building with his crippled wife, five cats and two dogs. The cats and dogs sleep on the bed, they sleep on the earthen floor, and they live on rummaging through the trash containers and scavenging scraps. It was a very famous case of murder because it runs as following: a sixteen-year-old killed his best friend because of a small unpaid debt. He hid the corpse in the cellar for a few years, then in the attic, and finally when the corpse started to smell too badly he threw it, decayed into bits and pieces, into the container around the corner: in my street, in my container. Now my street is a famous street. Until a few years ago, the red bourgeoisie lived in it, before, who knows, I wasn't born yet. It bears the name of an old patriot who wasn't a communist: Molerova Street. When the war in former Yugoslavia started, new people became rich; the money was mainly dirty, if not bloody. Now in my street, we have many expensive cars, fancy cafes, shops, and very strange shaved people with guns. They took the beautiful flats by paying off the very impoverished red bourgeoisie. I don't feel too sentimental about that. That's life, the sixteen-year-old killer lived in a beautiful building with fancy windows that I used to notice open every day, for years. He was airing the smell of the corpse. I thought it was some kind of protest against the war because we used to whistle from our windows during the demonstrations against everything. People protested from their open windows, flashing lights, music, noise. Yesterday a gypsy band playing their drums passed through my street: the criminals in their cars slowed down, respecting this old Belgrade tradition. Normally, if you take their usual parking place, they will take away your car and you will never see it again. They told me this. Their parking place, they told me is theirs because they say so. The law? No such mention. The police work with them, they won't say that but we all know it. I cannot say that I like my street, actually I never did. Too much reality in it, even though it really is a beautiful street with beautiful buildings which people do not notice anymore. Reality kills like a bullet in my street.

April 24th, 1998

Yesterday, the referendum was held: my friend said, now they will come to our homes and shoot us because we didn't vote. Yesterday was the anniversary of the Jewish holocaust. I can see a parallel, a ridiculous, not parallel parallel. Other meanings, other times, but the same shootings for nothing. I said to my friend: don't be stupid, no such thing will happen, you are being paranoid, I am not paranoid, I am a woman. I am persecuted anyway, I risk my life anyway all the time, whenever I do something, why should I risk it by doing

nothing? Men take risks when they fall into invisibility, women when they try to be visible.

Yesterday, our President gave a speech after voting. I know his face, I know his voice, I know his words and emotions: they are familiar to me through my family. But he is exactly that which I am running away from in my family, his patronizing, patriarchal, sober and pathetic aggressive tone: he knows best what is good for me. Always, as with my father, I have a second of doubt which ruins me for days. He is my father, fathers know what is best for you. My president, whom I know as a corrupted liar and merciless enemy was pretending he was my father, a father worried for my future: that is why he was sending me to war, that is why he is fighting the whole world. That is why tears came to my eyes. Some ten years ago, when Gorbachov was overthrown and brought back to power to finish his great work, tears came to my eyes as well. I wrote a story: Gorbachov and I, two big people. I felt, then too, that he looked like my father. My husband laughed at me, then as now. He laughed because of my crying for other men. Now men say: they will kill us all, us who didn't vote. Some years later, I read that a writer on Prozac cried too for Gorbachov: she too is a woman and knows that her crying has nothing to do with the men in power themselves, but with her being a woman on Prozac fighting her severe depression. But she was at Harvard when she was crying while I was here in the Balkans taking care of sick children, and the crying is what really brings us together and makes us sometimes fight on the same side, or understand the world as it goes around fooling and ruling us. Women in Kosovo fight with their men; I fight against my men. I cry for my men because they are cruel and stupid, because they want to rule not only me but the world. But if Elizabeth Wurzel at Harvard shares my tears of fear, joy, fear again, I am sure that women in Kosovo are with us too. It is being women that gives us the freedom to be political idiots and thus to make a point which nobody otherwise sees: it is the fact that we are never thoroughly in our skins but only in our roles that makes it possible for us to quit the role and make fun of it. It is the fact that we never wore weapons that makes it possible for us to stop the fighting, like jumping out of a movie and switching on the lights. The only trace of optimism today, after the faked patriotic referendum, comes from the fact that I am a woman. Otherwise, it is my socially weakest point except when it truly becomes dangerous.

April 25th, 1998

Funny: is normality when people stroll down the street as if nothing is happening, as if other people they know are not being killed because of their indifference, their lack of courage? They said no to the foreigners because they dared not say no to their big boss, to themselves as patriots of a virtual country: virtually free, virtually brave, virtually independent. I am a traitor, they say. Women are traitors anyway. I am a minority, they say, as a woman I am part of the biggest minority in the world. But as a woman traitor I am part of a group of 5-10% of the Serbian population. I am a minority of a minority. Homosexuals rate that percentage all over the world: they feel persecuted, without any rights, invisible. How do we, minority of a minority feel: sad, desperate, afraid. Depressed, we see ugly people around us, we don't like the sun at our windows, we shun our own children who, being children, cannot stop laughing and shunning their parents who are depressed. Because, life goes on. It really does, even when it is useless and stagnant.

April 30th, 1998

We sat last night with our American friend: during the evening I was so nervous that I could hardly sit. Her Serbian host didn't want us to smoke or drink because of her, but we did it anyway. The American was asking us how we could sit and talk with or say hello to our friends who became nationalists. I didn't understand her question. Then, we heard the news, we got sanctions. She was afraid her plane wouldn't leave the country. She was worried we wouldn't be able to send her photographs from our evening. I was worried too that her plane wouldn't leave the country but I was sure she would get her photographs. I wondered what they would look like in a politically correct vision. She asked me, what are the sanctions all about, and what will your life be like? I said, I don't care about my life anymore, I don't want your life either. I don't want to survive, I don't want to go into exile, I don't want to ignore my friends because they are nationalists, I don't want political friends. I am depressed, I am lonely, I am emotionally distressed. My unhappiness is without wishes, without desires. Can you understand, well-meaning American friend of mine, I cannot argue, talk or fight anymore, for me it is really too late. Maybe some other people can still be educated, changed, advised, trusted. For me, it is too late.

Most Americans we meet are just silent. As Hannah Arendt said, when I am a Jew and you, my friend, are a German in Nazi Germany, silence is not enough. But also words without deeds offend because the pain raised by impotence is beyond words. I remember at the

beginning of the Serbo-Croatian war going to the International PEN Congress party in Vienna. Nobody wanted to sit at a table with my husband and I -- with Serbs -- but an Austrian writer came with his wife to our table and talked to us without mentioning the war. I thought we were safe in our invisible pain. But at the end of the evening, he simply said: if you need money, if you need a flat, anytime, we are here. I started crying, and he said: I remember when I was eleven, I was a Nazi for five minutes. His name is Peter Ebner and his father was killed as a German soldier at the Russian front.

May 4th, 1998

I just watched George Orwell's 1984. Funny, it reminds me of my authentic feelings. It is terrible: if I am a character from that tragedy, then there must be some normal life going on somewhere at the same time as my life is going on here, by which the standards are set up. Yes, my dear friend from somewhere in the world, you name it, from some safe place, since you doubt from the deep down of your depression that there is something like normality. We who lost it, we who see four fingers and are forced to say five, we whose loves are destroyed forcefully by hunger, whose sexuality is destroyed by impotence to feel beautiful and desired, we who are driven into a war against ourselves in the first place, we who abjure our families, we who are traitors to nobody more than to ourselves in the first place; yes, we, **WE ARE THE STRONGHOLD OF NORMALITY**. From 1984 to 1998 only fourteen years have passed: I had a daughter in 1984, in honor of Orwell, and now I am telling my child that I didn't dream that some bad dreams may come true. She laughs, she should laugh, history is laughable, our fascism here is ridiculous, as Mussolini was a ridiculous killer. Our fascism here is a farce, a very dangerous farce, a very dangerous comedy. Our everyday escape is in the impossibility of the men in power to step out of the farce. My child says, it is like one of those futuristic American catastrophe films. Maybe she is right about this movie too, except that I feel it so close to my fears. Actually my fears are exactly the reality of the movie, or is it vice versa. Virtual space for both: in true reality too much fear and too much reality cannot be tolerated by human nature. So we laugh the reality off, in life or in death.

May 5th, 1998

Am I losing my mind? I hear voices in my sleep, saying yes, saying no, to peace, to war. I hear TV news, just like voices in my head, in my sleep. Now they say yes, now they say

no. To war, to peace. Is it people rambling, or is it my mind rambling? The truth is easy: just stop it. Whatever you are doing, stop it. Stop and don't even think, stand still and everything will fall into its place, as it used to be, as it should be.

May 6th, 1998

Today I went to a meeting of the Women in Black about Kosovo. We were about 50 women – feminists, refugees activists, women running nongovernmental organizations, women driven mad by the past wars – plus a few gay men. Most of the women from NGOs and feminist groups were seeing a parallel to the past wars in Croatia and Bosnia. I see it differently: we have had an apartheid state for Albanians in Serbia for the past ten years at least. We have created the Other. In Croatia and Bosnia, it wasn't so. It was boy's games and loot.

I said in the workshop, I have a nervous breakdown, I cannot speak, my men are being mobilized. The police enter homes. I started swearing and my voice trembled. The women said to me: they had no right to enter homes. Of course, they were armed and people are afraid.

It is not true, people are not afraid: they simply didn't know they hadn't the right to do it. Just as most victims of violence know nothing of their rights or righteous boundaries.

Women suggested peace caravans, peace protests, pacifist walks and global refusal of mobilization. We are beginning to act. But we were all aware that even more than six years ago, nobody would listen to us. People have gone crazy, not persons, but people.

The Women in Black standing on the Republic Square of Belgrade were spit on, and of course insulted: whores, traitors, crazy women. . .

Nothing new, in war or in peace, under the patriarchal sun. Even the language, the only living part of mankind which cannot be killed by violence, doesn't change when it comes to killing women with words as weapons.

May 9th, 1998

Today the international community decided on another package of sanctions against Yugoslavia, a stairway to total closing from inside and outside. I was in the market place,

people were talking of other things, of prices, of inflation. As if they knew not where it comes from. But the way they kept silent about the NAME, the hole in the middle of their sentences represented their knowledge. Of course, individuals are not stupid: people are stupid. Every individual has a potential universe in her/him. We are each born perfect, born the same. As life goes by some develop more -- absolute pitch, absolute body, absolute mind -- some develop less. Some develop nothing, some are killed while becoming perfect. In every person I see perfection, potential perfection, to which I appeal while talking to her/him.

Today the president's wife opened a maternity hospital in Novi Sad. For two hours the birthing was stopped. Women in labor were sent away. Power can stop life, but cannot stop birth. The delivery pressure of tons and tons of the baby's urge to be born, to survive, no political power can stop. But what comes next, to transform that precious little life into a miserable existence without power, or future...yes power can do that.

May 11th, 1998

I dreamed my child was a baby, a laughing baby. I dreamed I was dreaming and that I lived in a better world without the morning pain of waking into an unfriendly reality. For the past years, I cannot even date back how long, I awaken with a hole in my stomach: it is a hunger, for happiness, for emotions, for love and hope, for all those banal, cozy stupidities like fresh bread, easy music, whatever. My hole never closes, even if I drink, even if I smoke or eat. I know I stopped loving and being loved somewhere from inside, I know that we are only acting the moves of love. I don't know for how long. I want to die, to end everything except my dreams. I wish I could live only in my dreams. I am tired and old, and guilty of all things that happened to me and to others here in this land, in this city. I should have known better, I should have developed another life, a parallel life without a dead end. I should have known better, and I did know better but I failed to follow the truth I knew from inside. I came back to the country of my language, of my grandparents and I expected my dreams to come true. But my dreams became my reality and my curse. This is a country of exile. Nobody born here can realize their dreams here. You can only realize your dreams by going away, and then you can dream back of coming back. My dreams always fooled me, they never showed me the end, the end of my dreams, of my language. The end is blank and as barren as the hole in my stomach. I am writing this diary in

English, remembering Normality in a foreign language. It is not part of my Intimacy, it is not part of my Love. It is a matter of Distance and Sanity. I became a split personality, a normal split personality. Once you have to split Normality from your life, you become a normal split personality. A few hours ago, I relieved myself of my country, my language, my dreams. I am free to go. Where to?

May 14th, 1998

Since my breakdown two months ago I have felt that I have no home. I had the same feeling as a refugee in Vienna in a beautiful flat overlooking Prater park. I kept scrubbing the floor, moving the furniture, in order to feel at home, cozy, safe. My own flat in Belgrade has become an unsettled place for my mental health since the day of my breakdown. I dare not stay alone in the flat I bought, I furnished, I loved, one of the most beautiful flats in Belgrade. I want to move, to assume somebody else's flat and clothes, name and identity, maybe even children and husband. Of course it was a dream. I thought of throwing away my favorite sofa where I have spent hours and hours reading my beloved books. Of course I didn't. Because in the meantime I realized that I lost my homeland, that is why my feeling of homelessness has broken out in my home. I am a refugee in my own country, in my own flat. I am fighting everyday this feeling of loneliness, of danger, of depression, of lack of happiness. Sometimes I think I am dying, but I wave off that thought because I know it is true: I was dying anyway, but now I am dying unhappy. That is the news. My lack of home, my lack of homeland, of love, protection, security, hope and future is killing me. I don't have the energy even to run away, as I did once, coming back as a traitor to those I left behind to fight for my home and homeland. Now I am dying, killed softly and harshly. A little bit of happiness could maybe save me, if it isn't too late, just as the treaty does not come until after the devastation of war, the deed after the fear. Whatever happens to my home and homeland, I have had enough of it.

May 16th, 1998

Fear and anxiety: in my sleep, ups and downs of two alternative faces of the same Pain trouble me. When in fear I tremble. My sleep is gentle, my eyes half-closed and blind. I am small, powerless, nearing death. When anxiety advances, I want to fight back, I want to kill instead of being killed. I see no other way of resolving that strong painful energy in my belly, installed there to torture me. Through my belly, my mind works; my anxiety and my fear come out of instinct. Maybe because I am a woman, maybe because I am a modern. I don't believe in intellect, I believe in belly and pain in the belly. My mind can sue my belly, but my mind cannot detect real trouble, only my belly.

What are they doing to us? We are entering the long tunnel of fascism, a dungeon of blessed life without life. I saw it in Spain, I saw it in Italy; it is fascism with a domestic face, that of your primitive neighbor who beats his wife when she disobeys, and pisses the staircases when drunk. The face of a funny big man who is dangerous because he doesn't know his or your boundaries. The face of a Father/State who commits incest towards his children/subjects. The face of a patriarchal state, a farce pater/father in a farce state. It is rotten and it smells: but people in clean houses, between clean sheets make big loves or suffer, bake cakes or starve, drink rakija or drink poison. Never mind, people remain the same, and they will survive. At least some. For the Father/State, the number counts less than obedience, the beauty less than obedience, the happiness less than obedience. Is our Father/State happy? With us, yes. With himself: never. He can always do better, as a powerful Father, as a powerful State.

Fear and anxiety abruptly change places in my troubled mind. I fear illnesses, money problems, bad turns of nature no more. I fear for my mental health. It is precarious, it is gentle, it is mirrored in the faces of my compatriots who, troubled with bad teeth and bad sex, think not of their minds. My mind was my blessing and my curse. For some writers it was literature, it was talent: that is why I don't consider myself a true writer even though I belong to literature. My mind nobody can take away from me: I know all the numbers, I know the colors, the odors, the truths and the lies. My mind is hidden, ever since I was a bad little girl who knew too much. But if my mind starts shattering, fragmenting, I'm done for. My Inner Truth will crumble and the whole world will crumble with it.

May 26th, 1998

I have been away, to the seaside in Montenegro. They are few in number there, they want to separate from Serbia, Yugoslavia, and they are lucky in that they might succeed. They have two options instead of one, as we have here. They have the Mafia and the big money and the big world on one side, and poverty and primitivism and dictatorship on other. The leader of the first group sounds better, the voters of the second are better. They are evenly divided and are on the verge of a civil war; they will secede from us, as I would like to secede from myself, if only I knew where I belong.

The sea was great, the sea was blue, the sea was deep. The rain was pouring, dripping, falling. And I cried and cried for hours, day and night. All my tension came out in salt: sweat, tears and the sea. The last day, while dozing off, I had a strange feeling that the pain left me for good and walked away like a big gaunt man, waving back to me like a friend. And I felt easy and light and without past or future. I dreamed of not writing this kind of realistic rubbish anymore, about wars, truths, women, myself. Who cares about truth and me? Because I dreamed of a wonderful tale told by a man who came out of a TV screen and took me back into it, far far away from home and myself. I thought in my dream: that is literature, and I will write stories no more, since talent cannot be forced. I felt easy again.

Then I woke up and went to the piazza. Three men were sitting on the steps and drinking beer from bottles. They were workers building houses in this small village without people and with only a few houses. They were watching a small dog on the pavement left by his bitch mother, then staring at different points on the horizon, while one of them was telling a tale. He was a philosopher as well as a storyteller, a Homer. He said: there is no use in being too intelligent, too rich, too smart, too ambitious. . . That is not what life is all about. And all this money and politics and power, who cares, only fools. Because I know better. Listen to this true story: there was a man who left his home, wife and children to buy cigarettes round the corner. Once in the street he entered a crack in time. He was snatched by a hole in space and time. He didn't realize that: he bought his cigarettes and went straight back home. For him, only five minutes had gone by, but in the meantime twenty years had passed for his wife and children. His wife was dead, his children old. But he was still the same, unaware of what had happened. Now, that is what life is all about: the only sense you can make out of it is to put a stone over a stone, every day, build a house, love a dog, kiss a woman, pat a child. Then you drink your beer sitting on the steps of your

unbuilt house, waiting for your unborn children and knowing of the crack in the time. That is what life is all about.”

And that is what literature is all about and my dream and my trip to the sea, and my political diary. For you who some day may read it, who knows where and why, it will just be a crack in time you are snatched into unbeknownst.

FIRST DAYS OF TOTALITARIANISM, or POST SCRIPT

They, the nationalists in power, passed a new law on the University. The new law is openly against its autonomy. It claims students should study and not care about anything else: politics, autonomy, professors. Some students protested, they were beaten and insulted, even arrested. The rest of people are silent or confused. They know nothing of autonomy. They know very well dependence, it was communism, it is communism. People are completely broken down by hunger and the political dirt of the past five years, fifty years. I don't know any people other than these broken down people. Once they had money but they didn't care where it came from. Is this the way people are everywhere? Is there something such as common people, is there anything such as people? I realize there are people on the streets who very often raise some empathy in me. Are they the same people who care nothing about their culture, or the culture of their children? Yes, my parents were like that. They thought that knowledge is objective and bears profit. They thought my mind was a vessel, not my soul. And they were wrong. They lost me and I nearly lost my mind, because knowledge is emotion in the first place, love and faith in truth, not profitable. And now all these parents of children are losing their children who, once again, will nearly lose their minds with knowledge barren of emotions of truth.

Maybe the fire will break out in strikes, in protests, in a complete breakdown of the system. Maybe we won't be men and women in dark times, but probably nothing will break out and we will be in dark times anyway, as in Spain once, as in Italy once, as in most of Latin America all of the time, as everywhere where mechanisms of power are free to oppress. Some dissidents feel like victims today and ask: why me, why us, why are we born in this country, into this culture we don't belong to? And I wonder, does anybody enjoy this parade of totalitarianism? Are the few in power good for anyone? I don't believe they are. Serbs are like women who like being women, by which they mean that they are not feminists and they don't mind the construction of their role, their lack of freedom, equality, rights, their invisibility. I know how they don't mind, I felt that way too, as if it were a natural state, because you are born into it, and you don't have the strength and power even to change the position of your chair in your flat. Imagine the world! And I know that once you come out of it, you may lose everything, but there is no way back.

Once you see the reality without the veil, even if you become blinded you will know what the world is like.

Common people exist. I am an uncommon person who with four other uncommon persons make common people. I am sick and blinded or veiled together with the rest, because if I don't belong to them, I belong nowhere. I certainly am not a winner. I never was, and I never want to be.

May 29th, 1998

My dreams need a rest. I need a gentle word, at least one a day, but my dreams need more, they are the worst dreams in the world. A good world cannot be generated from such dreams. Even me, I am getting worse from my dreams, and sometimes I think I shouldn't sleep at all, because then they will leave this world and go to hell where they belong. I am tired, physically tired and I need a rest without dreams.

Yesterday I met people from the university: they say, there is no critical mass for protests, for a turn against the totalitarian law. My friend, a university professor, said that her own father, a retired university professor, told her triumphantly: Now you will have to obey, no more freedom. A war of our parents is still going on, a patricidal/infanticidal war between us and our parents, between survivors and big patriarchs, between political idiots (as I am) and political criminals (as they are). No winners, no losers, no right ways, no middle ways, only permanent strife and bad dreams.

May 30th, 1998

Love is a very dangerous state, the most dangerous of all. It brings you near dying, in bad times or in good times. Only in love can one overcome the fear of dying, or even of being killed. Love has always saved me from bad times, giving me worse times. No dark times can be compared to my deep void hungry for love and in need of devouring the object of my love. Love games are peace games of killing and being killed: they are unfair and dangerous, but they are one to one, face to face, back to back, until Romeo and Juliet, Lancelot and Guinevere, Othello and Desdemona bless us. War is vulgar, crude and stupid, even silly. To be a warrior one has to be slightly obtuse and devoid of the void of love and object of love. To be in war, in somebody else's war, one has to be cut off from normality

and thus crazy. Once cut off from normality, you wonder about what it was, did it really exist, was it virtual or real, was it objective or subjective. Today I know, it exists as real based on virtual and is as temporary as a shadow or the wind. It cannot persist on its own power because it has none: its motor lies within the changeable and doubtful critical mass. It is within people not persons, and it has no distinguishing characteristics, but when it wavers you physically miss it like an amputated leg or sudden blindness. Blinded people remember the light and life as it used to be and live it through memory as a chimerical song within a new reality, more real than the reality. I live my normality as art, as a song, it cannot be retold, it cannot be patented. I am it, it is me. Just watch me and listen to me. I am my own student and my own teacher. I am without father or son: no continuity, no philosophy, just barren me.

June 3rd, 1998

A few days ago a young soldier on his regular training was killed in Kosovo on the border with Albania. His last letter to his parents was published yesterday in a daily paper. It sounded sincere, cruel and true, as his life at that moment of life and death. No literature, no politics can be more direct, no decision more correct than: JUST STOP IT, ALL OF YOU WHO THINK YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT, JUST STOP IT. Young men are killed, they know they are being killed but they cannot stop it, they are just young boys out of school performing their traditional duty to the state, to any state in every history. I can imagine the parents of the boy, I could be his mother. I can imagine all thoughts: from “could we have done better?” to “he died as a hero”. Some years ago in the elevator of my building I met a mother of a soldier killed at nineteen. He was a punker, he wore an earring and played loud music. He was my next-door neighbor. I started crying in the elevator, I didn’t know what to say and even if I did, I couldn’t utter a word because of the overwhelming emotions. The mother embraced me and kissed me on both cheeks. She said: “Now, now, stop it, he was a brave boy and he died for his country”. I wanted to shout: but you are a crazy woman, you know it is not true, he was killed by people who are looting us of everything, our lives, values, goods, children. . . But then I saw her face: I knew she knew it. But she knew better too. It was too late to speak from a concrete situation, only abstract concepts could explain a historical event like a soldier killed in a war. She could have acted before, but then it was not her life, it was his life. Her plea to me was: don’t say it, don’t take his death away from me. Death took him, leave me his death to be my lifelong company. Mothers, I thought, mothers, traitors to the nations, traitors to their men, bearers of life and death, but who can never decide matters of life and death in life. Patriarchy and politics, I thought, make a society in which mothers are like court jesters: they say the truth but it makes no impact on the real world. We women can cross battlefields and territories in war drinking wine with soldiers, talking of life and food. It is the only way to survive, with any sanity, in this big world in which we are outcasts. Some will say it is a privilege: I say it is a dead end.

The mother in the elevator gently closed the door after me. I thought, his music will never again disturb me. He left silence behind him. Very soon I moved: the unbearable silence on my floor reminded me of my inner solitude. Desperate, I couldn’t stand it.

June 4th, 1998

Just a scene: the cheapest photocopy store in town in my street. They are very modern, quick and professional. But they are in an old one-storey building in the courtyard of a big classic building. In order to reach them, one has to climb a narrow staircase under which, in the cellars, live some Gypsies. In the past few years the son fathered two babies and now they are seven in one room. They all drink and make public scenes in the street, swearing, cursing or making fun of people passing by. They are an institution in my street. It was the old man who found the famous body in the dustbin. They live on dustbins and they always pay their debts and for their drinks, leaving money behind them.

Today I went to the store to photocopy my stories for my Swiss friends. It took me five minutes. I was feeling happy they wanted my stories. I always have ambivalent feelings about my work. I don't like it but I enjoy it, and I don't like other people reading it or commenting on it, because I think it is not important, and that there are other things more important to me in my life that we should discuss. But today I felt easy, because they are easy friends, not conceited, not writers. Just like me. Still I felt a little bit petty coming out of the store, since I believe that books should be read as they come to you, call it random, call it fatality. Never by force or will, it is no use to promote ideas without the world being ready to accept them. Actually, it is vice versa. The moment you write a book which is going to be read, it means the world has already put the ideas into you who is a medium or just a person with this kind of talent. You can also call it illness, lifelong illness, because it never leaves you, even when you don't need it anymore.

Coming out of the store, the old Gypsy woman was lying on the dirty pavement with her veins cut. She was lying in a pool of her blood, she was screaming: Radovan, you killed me, Radovan you are killing me. . . Radovan was running around her, and their beautiful dog, a male dog with a female name, Tijana, always clean and well-trained, was licking her blood. The babies were sitting half a meter away, not crying. I stepped over the blood and decided to leave them alone. Other people were doing just the same. Cars were stopping, men were rushing, but seeing the scene, they would just abandon it. I don't know why. I went home and from my window I saw her laying another half an hour and screaming. Her husband pulled her to her feet, he stopped her bleeding. They were both so drunk they could hardly keep their balance. Then they sat on the same doorstep and opened another

bottle of beer. The babies didn't cry, the dog didn't bark. We were all used to it, to their love quarrels. Usually she beats him and rarely he strikes back, he is smaller than she is and less aggressive. She has a big handsome lover whom she brings over sometimes when the husband is away, and when he comes back they all scream and fight. Usually all night. We cannot sleep because of the noise, but their dialogues are so interesting that we don't want to sleep anymore but we stand in the window and listen.

June 7th, 1998

A friend of mine, a translator accompanying a journalist to Kosovo was so moved by what she saw down there, that she changed into another person as she spoke. Usually she is a very haughty person playing a snob, a beautiful woman. Now she lost her role. She was explaining how the Albanians were illiterate, frightened and manipulated by their leaders too, not only persecuted by the Serbs. I know that is the real truth. I remember how some girls coming from the villages in Kosovo to feminist meetings in Belgrade had to overcome check points and terror four times. First from their own community, for communicating with us Serbs, then with the Serbian police for going out of their territory. And on the way back they were beaten, questioned and insulted, for the same reasons: by Serbian police for going out of the ghetto, and doubted by their relatives and companions for being women traitors. Some were in traditional Muslim veils and clothes once out of their village, and some wear jeans as in the other part of Yugoslavia. Their journey was through time, not only space, and they had to be careful not to fall into a crack of time and be swirled up in it, disappearing from everyday life.

I heard many policemen are refusing to fight in Kosovo, numbers in the hundreds, they are losing their jobs but saving their pride and Honor. I am relieved, they are saving my pride and honor, too. All of a sudden I feel I am not living among savages, among wild men, among killers, among idiots. Maybe it is a place like any other, this place where policemen with good pay give up their jobs for moral reasons. Any reasons are welcome, as long as they give up fighting. Civil disobedience is the only thing that we have to fight with.

June 8th, 1998

Men are sitting in Kafanas, all over Belgrade, around tables, their heads close, whispering in low voices catastrophic stories about their and our future and drinking beer. From very

early in the morning. They say phrases like: blood will be flowing on the streets of Belgrade in two weeks. Listen to me very carefully, I am sure of that; I am not afraid of being mobilized and killed, I am afraid of spending months in some trench doing nothing. This life is not worth living, we will all die very soon of hunger, of diseases, of street violence. It is finished with our lives, it is finished with our country, our children are doomed, we have no future. I listen very carefully to these men, they move me, they depress me. I try to help them, but they don't want to speak or listen to me. They scream at me, they ignore me, they behave as if I don't exist or cannot share their fear and pain. As if I am part of the Other, maybe enemy Herself. And it is true, once cast out of their intimacy over the tragic Round Table, I realized I didn't believe their stories. Their stories are the same, they are laments, they are archetypes, but they cannot be true or foreseeing. They are simply epic songs and ballads of heroes who do not want to be heroes. Intelligent men become doomed, lovers and gigolos become housemen, househusbands who think they have to take care of their wives and children or of the whole world. And they are impotent, they are afraid, they are little boys afraid to be killed but ashamed to cry. They prefer to doom the world than to say "No" to the war and bury their courage and their role plays. Not in war, in peace and love yes, but in war, never. War makes people archetypal, it takes away one's personality and individuality and turns it into a Greek drama, or some other collective script. I want to help all men and the men I know in particular, but they look at me as at a political idiot. Which is exactly what I am, but I am not ashamed to be. I don't even know what it exactly means to them, but I know that I chose that name in their language, to be safe from their language.

June 10th, 1998

Last night, at 4 a.m., in my street, in front of my window, a notorious criminal living a few doors away from me, killed a young guy because he was in a car with the criminal's ex-girlfriend. The ex-girlfriend lives in my street too, and I know her when she passes by. It was a cold blooded murder: the girl was screaming, don't kill him, he has nothing to do with me, he is a friend of my friend taking me home. And still my neighbor fired five bullets in the guy's head. We heard it all, we saw his brain all over the car, on the street. I went back to sleep, I couldn't feel anything except heavy sleep coming over my eyelids. It is the 4th murder in my street in 3 years, plus two bombs in a restaurant; my street is short and it has the biggest rating of death, maybe in the world.

My Gypsy neighbor bit her husband's flesh off, then he cut her with a bottle. Today, she was walking nude on the street. She said she was feeling natural and pretty. I remember the artist Kulik, who chained as a dog, nude, bit his audience in a performance in Zurich some years ago. He wanted to show the death of civilization, the death of art. He said: art is dead only artists are left behind. He claims we are in a prehuman stage and not in a posthuman one. He thinks this total decay brings free space, making way for new life. He is an optimist who was arrested more than once in big western cities while performing. I understand his work better than mine, mine lacks his courage but not his ideas.

June 12th, 1998

We are expecting NATO troops to bomb selected targets in Kosovo and in Yugoslavia. It might end the war -- I wish it would -- or just produce it on general level. Everybody is speculating. There is a strange shiver among people who comment on it, and those who ignore it. I feel I am done now with the war shiver. I had it so strongly six years ago when I left for Vienna to avoid expected bombs in Belgrade and war hysteria that now it only seems an echo. Pain, like fear, has a natural limit, after that comes indifference. The only thing that came to me is complete immobility. I dare not move, speak or plan anything. I feel safe keeping quiet and small and immobile. Oh, if only I were as invisible as I claim I am being a woman. If only I were a fly, an invisible fly who hears everything and flies away from the human race which lives so violently compared to flies. . . Looking back at the past month I have a feeling a year has passed by. Once days flew by, once in peace, now every day carries three days pregnant with anxiety and fear. It seems ages since I was at the sea listening to the "Crack in the time" story. It became our reality, we have all been sucked into a crack in time and space. What is happening here to Yugoslavia at this moment is out of time and space as you have it on the other side of the world. We are on our own here, in our own deluge, catastrophe, in a catatonic state. Waiting for the worst, in order to reach catharsis.

June 17th, 1998

Parents from all over my country are protesting against their children being sent to fight the war in Kosovo, for Kosovo. I wish I could see their faces. They must be some special people, who are honest enough to admit that it is still their old war that has been going on for the past 60 years at least. My parents think we should fight their war, they believe they

still have the key to justice and peace. They think they know best about everything, they consider me a political idiot, a coward, a traitor. I have a low opinion of myself anyway, because of my small life, full of anxieties and fear, without big deeds, without traces. My parents, like most parents here, think that children are made to continue their parents' deeds, and for nothing else: not for joy, not for love, not for fun. On the contrary, all emotions must be secret for if they become too manifest they will break the mission of continuity. But I am only a marriageable woman to my father, whose lineage is frustrated. My life has become more important to him than my deeds since I cannot continue his name. I can give him life-long nurturing: that is what girls are for. So once again, whatever I do in this war is not important, whatever I say nobody hears, not even my father since I cannot be his son or bear him grandsons, only love which he doesn't need anymore. Old people need only power and something next to immortality. Maybe a war for continuity, over our backs, on our backs. I say: OFF our backs, fathers. . .

June 18th, 1998

The woman who is helping me with my housework is a refugee from Knin, Croatia from the Storm operation in 1995, when they were bombed at 5 a.m. and fled in nightgowns, on foot, on tractors. . . She is trembling today, she doesn't sleep, she is afraid it will happen again here. She wanted me to calm her down, but I feel exactly like she does. I tremble, too; I don't sleep, either. We both feel guilty for not being at the right place once again, for having children we can't protect. And our men blame us for the same things. I tried to explain to her that it is not our fault. I know that our feeling of responsibility and guilt is irrational, but it is as real as it is ridiculous and groundless. Our fear and anxiety is so enormous that we clean, dust, cook all day long, only interrupting the housework to listen to the news. We behave exactly the same, me and my cleaning woman. In Vienna, 6 years ago, I behaved exactly like my Bosnian refugee friends whose houses were bombed while mine was only waiting to be bombed. We clean and feel guilty.

June 20th, 1998

I saw the children off on the bus to Greece. I stay to wait for NATO. I hear that people are betting: will NATO bomb Belgrade, Serbia these days or the beginning of September? Then there are those old communists who get angry, and say that bombing is a serious matter, and aren't you ashamed of manipulating such stupidity? Then there is the greater majority who don't think anything at all. They didn't think anything earlier, they won't think anything tomorrow, so how will they think of something today? They don't get upset. They think about watching the match between Yugoslavia and Germany tomorrow.

June 21st, 1998

From news to news: waiting for NATO. How will the successful game of the Yugoslav team take off on NATO? Perhaps they attack, but will ours return with the same measure? But, I still don't know what to do: I write a diary and drink, waiting for NATO.

June 23rd, 1998

Tension is in the air like shortly before rain, like electricity shortly before war. On my street, the Gypsy woman who lives in a basement is rolling half-naked on the spit covered sidewalk and on the glass from the beer bottle she broke. Not even Marina Abramovic in her latest performances could be that good. She's drenched in blood, police, help me, she shouts, they tried to kill me... Her son tries to get her out of the way while her husband stands stoically, in front of her, her grandchildren (two babies) are not even crying. She gives a long monologue about life, love, war, and simplicity. All the more frequently these days. Everyday, I feel as though the social and emotional space between her and me is becoming smaller. I know how and why she does what she does, and she knows why I don't do that. She is a Gypsy Girl; I am a White Girl. When she sees me she says hello sweetie. She is the last one who talks to me tenderly. The fire in my stomach continues to burn my belly. I dropped by the Women's Center. A friend tells me, 'have you heard what our policemen are doing in Kosovo?' We continuously receive e-mails: they rape, they kill...the same as in '92 in Bosnia. On every television here we only hear about terrorism and the Serbian people's centuries of suffering. There, casualties still have names. An American asks me, 'Do you want to go to Kosovo and see for yourself?' I don't have to. I know everything. Today, a policeman in civilian clothes almost killed me, driving his car

as if he were on the front. I looked at him in astonishment; he didn't even look at me. Such is the reality of the police and citizens in this state. I can imagine how it is in Kosovo.

June 28th, 1998

There is no trace of normality, here in a mountain village, waiting for NATO. People are silent, people are completely isolated and not even frightened anymore: they are refugees from the last war. Who cares for life! We are all refugees and survivors from a recent war. Who cares for life! I realize I am afraid of mutilation far more than death. And my responsibility for the children: all the children I know, who I saw grow up. I have cracked. I am anxiously depressed; others, the majority, who are calm believe that bombs will not come because nobody would dare to bomb. This blind argument makes bombing certain for me. That is exactly why They (whoever they are) do dare. My mother believes in ancient times, in her social protection, in the life of a married lady. My best friend cannot even plan food in peace, now she is angry she cannot plan shelter in case of bombs. She thinks not of death. My other friend plans love and fun and that is what she misses in this chaos – or gets! My father has planned shelter and food all his life. This is his war after all or the continuation of it. He says, this is no true war, I remember what war was. Well, I am outside them all: I don't plan for the future, or avoid planning, I simply don't plan. My unhappiness is without desire or judgement. I only suffer, my body is the receiver and transmitter of others' moods and games: my loyalty is my life-long duty, being a woman, being true. I hate archetypal situations. Life, birth, marriage, death: they can go on without me. They only need a body, a territory -- which is historically female.

June 29th, 1998

Men are afraid, afraid of the war. Serbian men are afraid and at the same time afraid to say they are afraid, to us, their women, to other men who are just as afraid as they are, and to The Wizard of Oz, the Big Brother who is not watching over them but using them. Men blame us, mistreat us, they will kill and rape us if we belong to the enemy community. Because they are afraid and afraid to say they are afraid, to be yellow, like a woman, who is brave enough to realize her cowardice. Yes, we women are torn between supporting them and saving them, and not supporting them and saving them. And all the time they need to believe they are saving us, women and children, by fighting wars and being afraid to die, being aggressive to the Public Other (Male enemy) and Private Other (Female). My

duty as a mother to a daughter is to take her away and save her life somewhere else. My duty as a mother to a son is to stay with him and support him by not supporting him, since he cannot abandon the war by law. It sounds like a Greek tragedy, but it is much less dramatic and much cheaper. It is sad and tedious, measured in pain and anxiety, loneliness and emotional death.

Love stories are falling to pieces, men and women are becoming members of a biological army in war against love and peace.

I am watching in front of me the deep deep Montenegrin sea. Behind my back, a football game is engaging compulsive patriotism, all the people from one side against all the people from the other side, which in this case is THE WHOLE WORLD. That is the message behind, underneath, aftermath. We all know it, we the onlookers, as they do, the actors of the invisible war terrorizing our dreams.

The Serbian host is an archetype of a patriarchal Omnipotent figure heading a family tribe. At the outbreak of modern wars all modern men become Serbian Hosts: a very ridiculous phenomenon because normally they only fake the Serbian hosts. But that is what it is all about here: About Normality.

July 4th, 1998

My friend from Women's center sent me an email saying: I don't have time to write a diary, but you write fiction, you do it for me, and I will tell you my stories, my impressions, so they don't get lost. I am so honored by this response to my writing. It is not the first time my friends ask me to write their stories. The sky is the same above us, an ugly clouded, black sky prepared to rain, bomb, kill us, the heavenly people, as the Serbian nationalists call us. So under this sky, we don't have individual stories anymore, we live the same archetypal life or accidental birth, accidental death. It could all happen without us, it all does happen without us, like all archetypal situations; war, like birth, marriage, death never stops. So I will write the stories of my friends as if they were mine: I am the official chronicler like Christina de Pisan in 15th century. I am not a writer anyway, I always say, I am a woman who lives and sometimes writes, that is my identity. I wish I could have a stall in the marketplace with a board: Professional Writer (Love Letters, Love stories, Business Letters etc, all for 50 dinars each). And my friend tells me the story she

wants me to write: it is about a refugee who works in a public institution where all of a sudden they locked up all the rooms with televisions, afraid that people might watch them. The point is that although there is nothing you can see on TV but lies, they are afraid that lies might tell the truth: the truth about this country being in war, about the abuse of its citizens, mobilizations, killings, starving. . . I don't know if I got my friend's story right, but I think it doesn't matter. It cannot be different from my story, even if I invent it. Because the reality gives us no options.

July 5th, 1998

Last night, in front of a police station, in the center of Belgrade, I saw a dozen policemen with sleeping bags and machine guns ready to leave for Kosovo. Their families were with them: mothers, fathers, wives, babies. The policemen were young and completely calm while the families seemed worried. It was unnerving to pass among the guns and sleeping bags thrown at random on the pavement. I dared not ask them anything, not even to take care of their machine guns so that we can cross the street safely. They behaved as if the machine guns were in the right place in a country at war. Uniforms in my country always take away the power of speech from citizens: because of the guns uniforms carry, because of the fears citizens carry. A permanent civil war between uniforms and civilians is going on: I never had the feeling that those uniforms were supposed to protect me. As if I were a criminal, I always had a feeling that some day they will hunt me because of my hidden thoughts of feminism, for not being a supportive mother and wife. For not being normal.

Yes, we are talking about normality and how to preserve it. Bad, bad dreams, very bad dreams every night. I wake up in the morning, my first thought: it is over. A cold, terrifying thought. I don't know what is over, but I know it is. The alleged Serbian war criminal who destroyed a city in the war with Croatia and killed many people committed suicide in Hague. His body was brought back to Serbia for burial. They speak of him as a hero. Many of my friends are nationalists too, and they are aggressive. I avoid these friends because we cannot speak about anything anymore; political opinion has become like a gossip party. I believe in gossip, it is politics that bothers me.

July 7th, 1998

I think it is over: I am done with life. I cannot stand it anymore. It's over. I think I'll do all

those things I never dared to do because I had a feeling I had a life ahead of me, time. . . Today is some kind of state holiday, something to do with falsifying history, with the Second World War. The shops are closed, the pensions haven't been delivered to the old people since a month ago when they received only half of a miserable pension. The black market is full of people dragging themselves in humid hot weather in order to get a carrot, an onion, a tomato for free. People are spitting and eating at the same place. The Gypsy woman under my window is singing her lungs out in a lullaby for a baby who cannot sleep because of her song. It is a scene from a Cabaret. I feel sick, I cannot eat because of the dirt and sorrow. For me it is over, I am on the other side by now of a normal life. Art and literature are frameworks for my death, but art and literature exist no more as sense and beauty, they are only coffins.

A Serbian woman from Kosovo said: Here we are not free to ask for help or to give help. We all doubt each other. She was speaking of Albanians. She was supposed to contact an Albanian women's group for help, but she called Belgrade instead. Solidarity among women is something that is forbidden in a patriarchal society, they are supposed to stick to their men's clans and interest. But solidarity among women is like solidarity among slaves, it is as natural as their condition is unnatural. Nobody can hurt you or help you as a woman from the enemy camp. When I speak about women's solidarity, I always know it is utopia which becomes real the moment you look for it. It is a vision and I see it all the time as an underlying sense to the superficial play of women sticking to their men. Maybe I am wrong, but I remember that all those times that I ignored this plan I was even more wrong. The conclusion being: in a wrong situation, there is no such thing as being right.

July 9th, 1998

Everything is falling apart: no pensions, no cash on the streets, and in the shops, no sugar, no oil. But plenty of bad dreams: inner drift with outer chaos. Foreigners with their missions taking over the decisions, without much knowledge or good will, but with energy and anger. Wild Serbs make the world go wild. I wonder, will we have public soup kitchens in a few months and "points" for buying necessary clothing, as my parents told me about after World War II? It is all so near and so far, as all this ab-normality is. Normality is a myth by now, my personal song, my prayer, the prayer of an atheist.

July 12th, 1998

Normality, AB-normality? Or maybe Normalcy and non? After nearly four months I wonder what is the word for my loss and my reality. I have slowly moved from the new reality in which hopes are a burden to another world where I am devoid of hope and unburdened. Clinically I am depressed, but no therapy can heal my terror of dark times or my fear of human nature, and no medicine any more than any short-termed drug or vice can treat my state of trembling because the world is a place without love. Is it the end of the love myth? When certain myths wither away, I wonder what comes next. I have no vision but of an atomic explosion, sudden and lifelong. But then pain has been inflicted and suffered in so many different ways over the centuries, and the world still goes on and on, even up to me who is today, as it is, in a deadlock.

Last night I was in a restaurant with a friend. It was dusk: a swarm of mosquitoes attacked all of us on the terrace with a beautiful view on the river Danube. Women started screaming: they'll hurt us, scar our legs and arms, and men were moving chairs and tables, acting the reasonable, responsible behavior of saviors and warriors. I thought if only one bomb landed here by mistake from Kosovo, all their nationalism would vanish. I stayed with my friend; mosquitoes drowned in our sauce, and we ate it and them as they ate us. The spoiled nationalists left all the food behind on the terrace, as if it was free, as if nobody had worked for it. It was similar to stories about the Russian aristocracy during the October Revolution, the French aristocracy during French revolution, and the Egyptian soldiers during the Six Day War. But all much cheaper. Serbian nationalism has the semblance of an aristocratic fascism. Still fascism it is.

July 17th, 1998

Somebody said: Life never ends, it only changes. Is it from the Bible? For me, life is ending, all the things I loved are coming to an end: I am helpless in front of such a cruel change. I am losing safety, warmth and ideas. Is that the change of life I am supposed to expect? To live as a vegetable, as a flower, as somebody's something: mammy, granny, wife, flower, vegetable? No, I will never follow the path of my grandmothers, the path my mother abandoned a long time ago. I know the price, it is priceless: the price of normality. But normality is not there where normalcy is. Normality is everybody's native privilege: whether you are born in a dustbin, or to a king. Normality is something anybody can lose: it is just like an empire. I am losing my love for this world, for this life. Can any other love

make up for that loss which is more than a primary loss?

July 18th, 1998

Is there such a thing as happiness? Yes, there is, I remember being happy, maybe for seconds, maybe for years, but I remember clear images of bright states of mind and spirit. And that sense of coziness in the cold world, before the primary loss, as if no loss will ever touch that warmth and coziness, that sense of being rich because of being alive, and being unique because of being as one is, with all one's faults, and all one's pains. . . And it wasn't a question of stomach: it was an issue of mind. My mind was cozy because of the big things awaiting it.

These days in Serbia the fascist government is turning the universities into primitive schools of concrete knowledge where creativity is banned and individual enterprise dangerous. Everywhere you turn, people are talking obsessive money talk, weather talk, survival whisper; there is no music, no joy in people in the streets, people in the shops, people in the schools, universities, or parks. I avoid people, I avoid even myself being unavoidably a person too. I am in a vacuum of primary loss itself. I am the primary loss, mourning my primary loss. My mind is working on my primary loss, remembering pictures of happiness and waiting for its death. Nothing dies, probably the Bible said, it only changes. Well, this change isn't timely or natural, it is murder. Murder of happiness, of images of happiness; murder of the work of the mind.

July 22nd, 1998

For the past four months I have been in a state of nervous breakdown. The war in Kosovo started openly five months ago, and I have learned in these past four months to live with my nervous breakdown. I thought I was dying. I was trembling, I was losing my mind. I thought that was it, that was the end. But then it kept happening, again, again and again, the trembling, the dying. Small death, small death, small death: big death.

Women are joining the army in Kosovo, the Albanian women, the Albanian army; maybe they are right. They gain the love of their men and society, and lose their nervous breakdowns. You cannot be in a nervous breakdown, losing your mind in the cage of impotence (of gender and peace) when you have to fight for your life with guns.

I think of going away, of abandoning everything that has to do with such options. If sense

has gone out of our lives, I have better worlds: nirvana, eternity, music, search of beauty and God. I have It in me and sometimes I let It fly into the Other. Not lately, it has become a luxury I dare not indulge in: somebody may kill me for trying to steal something that cannot be stolen. Or just kill me out of envy, jealousy, cruelty. Laughter has always been banned from dogmas. The big dogma of this situation is that it is serious, that it is a matter of life and death and that we should be ready to die. As a kid, I remember, my parents didn't permit me to laugh publicly. Now, I can do anything I want, laugh or cry, publicly as well as privately. I am a big girl now, but still, the only thing I can think of is vanishing, saying goodbye to this life without life, to this new normality without normalcy, to this free space where nobody wants to listen to my song, not even I.

August 31, 1998

Back to Normality: our traffic lights, on the streets and roads are out of order, they are hidden by the branches of trees nobody takes care of anymore. I nearly got killed today by a car whose driver couldn't see the lights because of the trees. And I wasn't angry for nearly getting killed. It wasn't his fault, it wasn't my fault, it isn't anybody's fault for what we are going through: brainwashing, violence, brainwashing... Allegedly a Serbian mass grave has been discovered, where hundreds of people were killed, raped and killed, by Albanians, terrorists... It sounds terrible, it sounds impossible, impossible, terrible... Allegedly President Milosevic was supposed to be killed at the same time in the same way as Princess Diana: the two peace makers of the world? Impossible, ludicrous...

Today a wonderful light fell on Belgrade from the sky. I nearly said to my husband: I love you, let's have another child and stay forever in this city. Otherwise everyday I am packing in my head, my suitcase becomes more visible and less immense, more literal, less literary. In my head countries are switching like Satellite channels: which country can accept my past, my present and my death? Hardly any, but still, the more countries I exclude the closer I am getting to a place waiting for me.

September 30, 1998

My cousin has been hospitalized for AIDS. She is dying. The next night we had an earthquake, a strong earthquake. We were all on the streets thinking it was NATO bombs. My cousin missed the earthquakes, both that one and the next ones: the NATO threats,

fears, angers. She was dying, she still is. She got better and then at a certain point she got worse. I went to see her. She was a wunderkind, a lovely girl, and now she is the most beautiful patient in the AIDS department. People there are without faces, moving on stable legs, or very thin but active. She is like a saint, a beautiful medieval picture, small, white and immobile. She smiles at me. I don't cry, I dare not cry at her smile or whisper. I just want to faint. I want to die instead of her. Who cares about bombs, about earthquakes, when you have a chance to stay alive. She has none. Only love and love pain comes close to this pain. With her, my childhood is going away, my ideals, my dreams. Who cares about NATO, Normality or earthquakes if she is gone. I am not able to be the only one in this world with those ideas of happiness, beauty and bliss we lived together as kids...

I hold tightly to my child during the night to repair that bliss from childhood, but it is no use. It is different, I am a mother with a responsibility to make the world go round, to care about normality, to care about bombs and earthquakes. There is no bliss in it. I see my dying beautiful cousin every day. I feed her as when we were kids, she younger, me older, but both kids, alone in a blissful world, to take care of one another. She is my therapy and my therapist. She knows it. I say, stay alive. She says, I have no place to go. I say, stay alive for me, I will find you a place. Her eyes sparkle, she gets hold of my hand, feebly. She still has a beautiful hand. I say, promise. I dare not say there is no more place to go, because of bombs, because of earthquakes. But I promise. I cry outside the hospital, not inside with her. With her I am happy.

In the hospital ward the water tubs are full of vomit. Most of the expensive medicines are unavailable and food is brought from outside. The patients share their food. People don't stay long in the AIDS department: relatives just rush in and out, out of duty, out of fear. The nurses don't talk to patients or visitors. They think everybody knows everything: those who cross this threshold, abandon all hope. It is a difficult place to die, but even these hospitals are not meant for death. The last five or six years in Belgrade have had this atmosphere. Death reigns. My father spent hours on the doorstep before the hospital opened in order to be among the first ones to get a pacemaker. It wasn't a question of money, but of sanctions, no pacemakers for Serbs. And he got it. Younger people died whose dignity or duties didn't allow them to sleep on the steps. When my father had a heart attack there was no batteries for the machine to regulate his heart. A young man next to him died. I saw him die. I was rushing to the black market to buy the batteries and when

I rushed back, my father said, the poor man he died, grab his covers, I have none. I did it, I grabbed the covers off a dead body, moving the dead, still warm, unknown body. I had a clear feeling for that unknown who suddenly through his warm covers became familiar to me: this is not death, this is murder. And I got angry. Let's find the murderer. The consciences of ordinary people become political through normality, loss of normality. Even political idiots like me.

October 10, 1998

I am afraid. I am not ashamed to be afraid. I should be ashamed to admit I am afraid, obviously. Nobody admits he is afraid. I am afraid of death, of a bad life, of the bad sides of people I may find out in war. I read in heroic literature about the wonderful sides to people which spring out in difficult situations. But, as nothing in heroic books came true in my life, I don't believe in that anymore. Yesterday in the queue to pay new war taxes -- for the war in Kosovo, for the monasteries, for the army, for the weapons, against Albanians from Kosovo, refugees, NATO and the whole world -- people were worse than I ever realized. Worse than in the whole world, not only here where queues are regular everyday life. A tax is called for, along with others, on luxury cars; but every car is considered a luxury, and everyone should sign a paper that he is regularly paying all taxes and ready to pay a luxury tax on cars. The people in the queues were of all ages and both sexes. They were rude to each other, and dirty and untidy, that is, rude to themselves. I looked at my image in the mirror: my hair was dirty too, I am not washing my hair as a protest against the war. And they were cynical and aggressive, talking about war, bombs, nations and misery. One said: I wish the bombs would fall as soon as possible. All the rest looked at him scornfully: Of course, we all do. Nobody said anything about wishing bombs not to fall. Is it because Serbians have a collective sense of guilt because the wars following the breakup of former Yugoslavia have never been on Serbian land, or is it just the decadent predisposition of warriors to death?

The people on the streets, in the queues, on the market, they are just like me, and still they are so far away. They are not afraid, they despise my fear, they despise people like me, even if I am one of their own flesh and blood. They destroy children like me or keep them in cellars. That is exactly where I spend my life in this male and warrior culture, in the cellar. For some incredible reason they believe that bombs are part of everyday life. They

clean their cellars and buy their candles, and say they will defend their country until the very end. Is it possible, nobody is afraid? Is possible that pride can win over fear, and *if so*, where is my pride? I am not proud of my proud people, they killed and humiliated other people. Even if they had orders, they did it because they just do it. And yet I am not ashamed of my people because I don't consider them worse than people as such, I just see them as people who have no chance to be better. I am a woman and a coward: even my children are afraid because of my fear for them. They want to send me away from the war, away from them, *they want* to be calm and unconscious, together with their friends in a friendly atmosphere in a shelter, near a discotheque.

Last evening Women in Black had a demonstration in the Square of Republic. On one side were we women in black, in protest; on the other side were people from the opposition in small groups moving among themselves as at a cocktail party. Police were around protecting the protesters from the aggressive onlookers who were spitting on us occasionally or shouting, Whores, Whores. We carried small rucksacks with IDs, money, spare clothes, in case we got arrested and tied to a tree as a NATO target as Seselj, the vice president of the Serbian government, promised to Women in Black, to women and traitors. I heard I was a traitor from my parents because I am not supporting the power, from my husband because I am not supporting him. We betray our children anyway.

October 11, 1998

I don't think I ever experienced fear as bad as this. As a vacuum, as a loss of memory, as hunger and vomit at the same time. Maybe when I was born, maybe when I gave birth, something similar occurred, but it also had joy in it. Joy and fear were playing together, overlapping each other, losing days in my memory and filling it with centuries. My friend is writing in her notebook all the words of fear people are saying around her. I am speechless, I am in bed, ready to make a decision but unable to choose which. I feel that my thinking of death isn't as bad as this feeling of imminent death as a lottery. NATO says if 20,000 civilians are killed in the bombing, it is a price they can afford. For what? I could never be a politician, I could never be a soldier, filled as I am with fear and reverence for sheer life: that of an insect, of a flower. I would sign immediately my defeat and put down my weapons. I have done it so many times in the past without knowing it was out of fear. But fear was somewhere stored in my body for many centuries and it comes out not only in

fear but also in action: I move, I think, I move. But I cannot decide. Neither can most other people. They are not even storing food or water. Too late for that, we did that years ago, now we have come to some kind of end.

Last night we celebrated a birthday party. We couldn't get drunk, we didn't have hangovers, and we couldn't stop laughing. It was the same pattern of behavior I have during funerals.

Most people are not very afraid, they believe nothing can happen to them. I always think that it will happen to me, the worst: the pictures of Albanian refugees I see on foreign TV are haunting me, I feel responsible, guilty, I feel a pain in my stomach. I remember the Albanian girls I met this summer crying out of fear of what would have happened to their families by the time they went back. I cry now, thinking of them with their families. I am changing, I am becoming not only softer, I am becoming harder too. I see the insensibility around me, I am closing myself, shutting my joy, my words. I am between being a saint and a criminal.

October 12, 1998

I am completely divided into somebody who doesn't care at all about the bombs and somebody who will commit suicide in order to cope with the fear. People here are the same, half of them care, half of them don't give a damn. I have them both as a curse in me, the curse of a writer as a transmitter. Everything passes through me, and then out of me, but it also takes me with it. Maybe it is a sickness not a curse. People begin and end their dialogue with bombs, in the market, in the newspapers, in the cabs, functional dialogues about whether to do this or that. Collective therapy, catharses, maybe this is finally what I always thought the Serbian people needed, since the beginning of the former Yugoslavia conflicts. Even more than the truth they need to feel, or both in one: TO FEEL THE TRUTH...

October 13, 1998

I am numb, in a state of shock. I realize with my head that we are not anymore in imminent danger of bombs but I don't care anymore. I am living on a timeline of death, a deadline. I cannot get drunk, I cannot fall asleep, what if death catches me unaware?

The treaty of non-aggression will be signed on Saturday night. Is our fear enough for all the pain Serbian people have caused to others since 1991? I cannot say that I would give my life for anything, I am not a hero. On the contrary, I am one of the few explicit, outspoken cowards amongst my people. But I would give my life to avoid that fear again, to avoid preparing for shelters. Instead of buying cans of food and bottles of water, I thought of buying pills, for temporary and eternal sleep. In case I lose my strength to survive and keep my children from realizing how life can be unjust and senseless. As every mother knows deep down in her heart all her life: the main pretence and duty of a mother is to make life less painful and senseless. The result is a happy child, a happy grown-up child who turns into a mother. But beyond certain limits, one cannot pretend anymore. The children become the parents and the parents become cowards. In a shelter without food or water but with an enormous sense of guilt and duty.

October 15, 1998

I have seen in the center of Belgrade people expecting foreigners, finally... Whatever that means. My child last night said: I wish we had some black people and Chinese people living with us, not as foreigners but working with us, in schools, in public places. Last night armed police forced in a flat in my building where some people from Taiwan are working. We have mixed feelings for foreigners: is it occupation as some claim it, or is it finally opening to the Other. I am foreigner myself, half Other, all my life people from here both adored and hated my foreign half: they never just accepted it as a reality I didn't choose. The treaty our xenophobic president agreed to, is it a loss or a gain for the Serbian people, or just the only way out of the mess he made?

People are in shock here, flattened under the heavy propaganda of what is good or bad for them. Mainly they are silent, afraid to think, afraid to pronounce judgements. Their lives are definitely changing and they have been changing fast, for too long, too fast: living on the edge.

Today is the demonstration against the banning of two independent papers. I am not sure many people will come: where are the people, in the sunny streets walking, on the black markets smuggling, having babies, making love, fighting petty fights to avoid Big Talk?

October 18, 1998

Last night, the night of the new NATO deadline ultimatum I risked death. I wanted to die. Like my Gypsy friend I got drunk, drugged and aggressive and I wanted to kill and die. I hit my head, concussed my brain, my nose bled, and a few teeth and a finger. There. My war. I wanted to use a knife, against myself and the Other.

I read the news of how some Albanian women with babies were thrown into the water in Italy when a police boat approached the boat loaded with smuggled refugees. My throat is dry, I cannot even scream with horror. I think of my baby and I hug her and feel her as unsafe as ever, as always since I had her. The world is no place for life. We have no right to give life, we crazy women. And I think, all these months, I have been writing about my pain, hardly naming my constructed enemies, the Albanians, the Other, the Dead. What right did I have to do so? I wanted to show them my formless sufferance, and I think I entered the dark side, the Other, the twilight zone of no return. Last night I smelled death and blood and I didn't retreat. I thought it was my price for being there.

CNN was on the street interviewing people at the demonstrations for freedom of expression, against the closing of the independent papers. A man they questioned was a journalist. CNN said: no, we want a normal person. So it exists, this normality, and it is not CNN, it is not a Serbian male journalist. It is somebody like me, a political idiot, that everybody is looking for to trick, inform, create, construct, manipulate. Well, here I am, these are my words and they have taken away my song.

November 13th, 1998

My cousin died November 10th. I was there when it happened. I had a vision two days before that it would happen, the day, the hour. I went to the hospital. They wouldn't let me in, so I stood in front of her window when she died. It was a beautiful day, sunny and clear. I entered the ward, gave the flowers I had brought for her to a very thin guy who seemed nice and very sick. The beautiful young lady doctor didn't mention the word AIDS when I asked the immediate cause of her death. She said: you know what this ward is for. That is exactly how all people dealing with AIDS, whether as patients or doctors or relatives deal with it: through an evasive question. I said AIDS, I said SIDA -- the French and Serbian version -- and then I proudly left. When I left the hospital I took a long walk. I felt privileged for having been there, for having entered that ward, for having such a lovely

cousin who died while making even a ghost sickness like AIDS lovely. She was calm, smiling and in peace. She even confessed her sins to the Head of the Serbian Church himself when he came to visit the sick, even though she wasn't religious and I doubt she thought she had any sins. All her life was a sin, seen from the outside, and she couldn't do that. Even on her deathbed.

I went home crying, feeling blessed. I found her photograph when she was young and went to the newspaper to give announcement of her death. And then I did it: I didn't put her name, only her nickname. I didn't give date or cause of her death or funeral. I just said. My dearest Biljka, who paid the tragic price of a feminine life. And the women in the newspaper office cried, all the people reading the announcement cried. Was that the point, to make them cry? Yes, to make them understand by crying. I went home, I went out for dinner to talk and think of her, to drink to her memory, to her soul, to remember her drinking with me, talking to me... Because life, for me, will never be the same, with or without normality. She wrote but never published her stories. Because they would have destroyed her life and shown it to be out of normality in the midst of our striving for normality. Because my lovely cousin was a junky, an outcast, a victim of AIDS and its prejudices and a writer who never published. Publishing and telling her story straight would mean losing her friends, her social security, her job... She preferred faking Normality because she was brave, much braver than me who needs it as a reality.

January 19th, 1999

I washed her body, I saw her body, it was a dead body, a body that carried my body for nine months. A small withered body without skin, she is dying alive, her mind is completely alive, lively, dangerous and aggressive. She hates me, she adores me. She wants to say goodbye to me, but she dares not, she says, I have decided to have this operation, first I said no now I say yes, because I have decided. She is lying, I have decided for her. I asked the doctor, does she have an option, he said, no, and then he said there are many options... Her body smells, she has been lying for weeks, immobile, but her hair is like a baby's hair and I am combing it, cutting her nails, crying and holding back vomit in my throat. My father is looking away from us, he is a man, and men are supposed to be strong, he is crying too, he thinks she will die, he says, we wish you all well, all the best. I shout at her, pull yourself together, you must eat, you must drink, you must move your

legs... I mean you must survive. She is angry with me shouting, she is muttering to herself, my body my self... I know she wants to live to see her granddaughter again, but I also know she cannot stand the humiliation of being dirty, of being washed by me, nude... Of course I thought, will I end this way too, at least my daughter is not brought up to take care of me, somebody else will do it. I could do it to any dirty old lady or man but not to my mother who was always the cleanest lady in the world, my angel. We are not crying, it is snowing outside and the city is grey, dirty, poor and chaotic, Belgrade under sanctions, facing bombs, facing civil war. She says, Clinton is a dirty old man, his women will get him one day. I think, Milosevic is the dirty man but I say nothing, it is her hospital, it is her operation. All her worse characteristics are coming out: her lack of tolerance, her bad physical habits, her compulsive gestures, her anxiety, her lack of courage and positive thinking. I say doctors are cowards, and she smiles at me. I know it means, you know nothing about life, but she doesn't know that unfortunately I do. I didn't manage to escape her fear and I hate her for that. It is too late for me to have more children, to be easy and happy, I am inside her sick body because of her fear and she doesn't even know it. That is my only revenge: she knows nothing of my pain, she knows nothing of life, she only thinks she does. All the operations and drugs I have taken undertaken, risking my life, facing desperately death in order to become strong and escape her fear of dying. But now it is too late. Her decayed body is taken down to the operation hall and my father and I are leaving the hospital. He is calm, I did that to him. He is waiting for a taxi, speaking of how lonely he will be without my mother, not mentioning how lonely she will be without her life. Men again. I said, she is my mother, not only your wife, let's not speak about her as if she were dead. Let's not speak at all.

I am walking down the dirty streets and talking to myself: I wish I were pregnant, who knows why...

March 26th, 1999, 5 p.m.

I hope we all survive this war and the bombs: the Serbs, the Albanians, the bad and the good guys, those who took up the arms, those who deserted, the Kosovo refugees traveling through the woods and the Belgrade refugees traveling through the streets with their

children in their arms looking for non-existing shelters when the alarms go off. I hope that NATO pilots don't leave behind the wives and children whom I saw crying on CNN as their husbands were taking off for military targets in Serbia. I hope we all survive, but that the world as it is does not. I hope we manage to break it down: call it democracy, call it dictatorship. When NATO estimates 20,000 civilian deaths as a low price for peace in Kosovo, or President Clinton says he wants a Europe safe for American schoolgirls, or Serbian president Milutinovic says that we will fight to the very last drop of our blood, I always have a feeling they are talking about my blood, not theirs.

And they all become not only my enemies, but beasts, werewolves, switching from economic policy and democratic human rights to amounts of blood necessary for it (as fuel).

Today is the second aftermath day. I went to the green and black markets in my neighborhood. They have livened up again, adapted to new conditions, new necessities: no bread from the state, but a lot of grain on the market, no information from the official TV, but small talk among frightened population of who is winning. Teenagers are betting on the corners: whose planes have been shot down, ours or theirs, who lies best, who hides the best victims, who exposes the best victories, or again victims. As if it were a football game of equals.

The city is silent and paralyzed, but still working, rubbish is taken away, we have water, we have electricity... But where are the people? In houses, in beds, in shelters... I hear several personal stories of nervous breakdowns among my friends, male and female. Those who were in a nervous breakdown for the past year, since the war in Kosovo started, who were very few, now feel better: real danger is less frightening than fantasies of danger. I couldn't cope with the invisible war as I can cope with concrete needs: bread, water, medicine... And also, very important: I can see an end. Finally we in Belgrade got what all rest of Yugoslavia has had: war on our territory. I receive 10-20 emails per day from friends or people whom I only met once: they think of us, me and my family and want to give me moral support. I feel like giving them moral support, I need only material support at this moment, my moral is made out of my needs.

People are gathering at homes, to wait for the bombs together: people who hardly know each other, who pretended not to know or who truly didn't know what was going on in

Kosovo or that NATO was serious all along. We sit together and share things we have. Solidarity and tenderness brings the best out of Serbian people. There it is: I knew I liked something about my people...

My German friend living in Belgrade phones me, she says, I didn't leave the country, I didn't take out my children, even my newborn grandchildren. I am fed up with everything, I want to lead my personal life. My feminist friend asks me to have a workshop with our group of consciousness raising, my other friend wants us to go to Pancevo, the bombed city at outskirts of Belgrade, to give a reading of my novel. But there is no petrol, we must buy bicycles.

We phone each other all the time, seeking and giving information: I realized children are best at it, they prefer to be active rather than passive in emergency situations. We grownups harass them with our fears and they are too young to lie or construct as grownups do: they deal with facts and news. Mostly we are well informed, with children networks, some foreign satellite programs and local TV stations.

I think of the Albanians in Kosovo, of my friends and their fears, I think they must be worse off than us; fear springs up at that thought, it means that it is not the end yet.

I have no dreams, I sleep heavily afraid to wake up, but happy that there is no true tragedy yet, we are all still alive, looking every second at each other for proof.

And yes, the weather, it is beautiful, we all enjoy and fear it: the better the weather, the heavier the bombings, but the better the weather, probably more precise bombings. I wish I only knew do we need good or bad weather to stay alive?

And finally, I saw Benigni's film "La vita e' bella," the night before the first bombs fell. The next day, it started happening to us too. Maybe I shouldn't have seen it, but now it is too late: and I realize in every war game led by Big Men the safest place is that of a victim.

PS. At this moment the alarm is interrupting my writing...the alarm is my censor and my timing. I switch on CNN to see why the alarm is in Belgrade, they say they do not know. Local TV will say it after it all is over.

March 28, 1999

Belgrade is still rocking, shaking, trembling: we are entering the second phase of NATO intervention. The alarm is on for hours, nearly 24, I need go out, to buy some food: we are not really hungry, we are not really falling on our backs, people who have been through a second or third phase of NATO intervention say it can get much worse. At this point people off and on the streets take pills to stay calm, or just cry to stay calm. The shelters are crowded, lively and sad. Children behave like soldiers, notoriously bad mannered Serbian children compared to, let's say, English or Italian. Young adolescent people are the most frightened and Gypsies, the Gypsies with babies on their fronts and on their backs cry, they will kill us, they will destroy us. They have been attacked for the past few centuries, whilst adolescent people protest: we want our normal lives, we cannot waste our lives in shelters, first loves, first excitements. We, the others, behave as if we have time, time to stay frozen in a shelter for weeks and resume what is left of our life afterwards: just end it, immediately, never mind how, all the rest are details.

Every evening I go with my friends and family to the big underground station in the neighborhood: a shelter, I know people there already, of all ages and social types. They come with stools, and small talk. We think of making an emergency plan. In all cases, we try to list the many possible developments of the situation, hardly any can be good for us, common people who cannot believe anybody anymore, who have nothing but a few dollars in our bags and a lot of bad experience. At least we are not pathetic, I say and our children will not be spoiled. More and more we seem to me as some Indians, stubborn, ridiculous and honest in some absurd way: doomed to nothingness, to physical survival and a true null. I even say, my daughter will be a rarity, a true Serbian beauty, ready to die for nothing: won't some cultures love that? It will be so exciting for those who are afraid of lightning and thunder to see a thin teenager in jeans not afraid of bombs.

We watch news all the time, all news all the time, no good news, no precise news, but we do get some information, through the women and children's network.

I watch Jamie Shea from the NATO press conference. He is terribly precise, you hear him you hear it all, our reality seems only a slight deviance from his course. But of course, it isn't that simple, if it was, he would be God and it would really be terrible to have a military God after a religious God.

I fight for my computer every day, every hour, everybody in my family wants my computer, the only one at home, for playing, for studying, for communicating. I always hated computers but I use it for writing and for sending my ideas off to the world. I fight between the urge to write and not to write, writing in war is not like writing in peace, though for me writing has always been a matter of biological urge to avoid the pain.

We heard from our friends from Kosovo, they don't want to speak on the phone, they are living already what will probably come to us in a few days: killings and looting of flats, houses, complete anarchy. For the time being we are underground, I heard somebody say that 8 million Serbs are underground. I just visit underground because I think it is part of the local propaganda to keep people underground, not to worry about their moves and more than elementary needs. When the sirens come on I deliberately go out on the street, says a friend of mine. The situation is the opposite of demonstrations in '97 when everybody was outside. Maybe we should set up an underground state with its new democratic laws: maybe a state run by women and children, according to their needs and morals.

The people in the underground station are sitting in the trains, for days. The first day they were frightened, restless, waiting anywhere around the huge place, on the sidewalks, benches, mobile staircase. Now they are sitting with barely enough space for their feet, hardly getting out to breathe other than the stale air of a train to nowhere. My friends are inside, a family of dour refugees from Krajina with two grownup sons. They say they spent five years in worse conditions, these are really good conditions. It looks to me like a trans-Siberian journey to nowhere, but I visit them regularly, bringing them food and blankets. They wonder why I go out. I say, yes, I am afraid, but I am even more afraid to stay for the next twenty years obediently underground, whatever happens outside. Not much does really happen, most of things happen in our insides, in our undergrounds.

I see a rich, snobbish woman with her baby son in a dirty train compartment. I wanted to say hello to her and then I stopped. I didn't understand or approve her being here: she could be anywhere, the fact that she is here is a sign of political craziness I disapprove of.

March 29, 1999

It is gloomy, it is raining, the alarm is on all the time. I've just heard that martial law with execution as punishment has been established. I still cannot believe we are living in war, we are living in a nobody's war but no less true and cruel and in tradition with what war is all about, false heroism and false excitement. Today I haven't been out. I heard some friends of mine haven't been out at all, all these days. As I said, the act of going out has become an act of courage. In few hours my life has changed completely, everybody's has, but still I think we are becoming at this point different people, in different situations, in different alliances. I gather my strength to be strong and bear the change. Children are changing, surrounded by fear, anxiety and four walls: we have to be creative even in these circumstances, like in Benigni's film "La vita e' bella". As usual art comes as an advice, as a cure, and only after you get sick, never as a prevention.

March 30, 1999

Today no bombs. I slept 16 hours, no alarm to wake me up. The children went to a rock concert, a terrible rock concert with folk singers mixed with good groups, for children from the underground: a terrible audience too, a mix of nationalists and modern people. I hear they destroyed McDonald's; the café in my neighborhood is called no more New York but Baghdad Café. The fliers that people carry show a heavy vulgar sense of humor, not very witty and anarchic, right to the point as they usually are. A BBC journalist said, Serbian people are big-hearted, they wouldn't have killed the pilot of the fallen plane, they would have given him home-made bread and brandy as they claim. But how come then NATO generals claim that Serbians are committing atrocities against Albanian civilians: I believe them both. I wouldn't offer bread to the pilot nor kill anybody not even in self-defense, only when defending a child. Somebody taught me that, maybe wrongly, but that reflex I carry as compulsive.

My God, we are in war, I just heard some rules about war, no contacts with foreign press, court martial for war deserters. People from mental hospitals are in the street, the hospitals are being used for the wounded. My women friends are all gathered in various humanitarian centers working with critical situations, refugees, Gypsies, old and frightened women who live alone. My best friend says, only when helping those who are in a worse situation than I can I stop my breakdown. She is helping Albanian women get out of Pristina. I am different, I get these strong emotions and visions which only by writing I can

get out of my body. Without even understanding what I am saying, the words run ahead of me, they make sense to me only after they manage, if they manage, to penetrate my body again. I write so clearly everybody says, but I am so stupid, I know it, my writing is only an honest admission of my stupidity.

My father used to dream of bombings long after the war was over, wake up during the night and take me out of my bed and carry me out to the basement: sleepwalking. I remember him doing it, I did it myself last night, to my daughter, a few times. I feel as if a sickness is getting out of my body, a long historical fever, a buried anxiety which I inherited being born a Serb of a Serbian father from Herzegovina: other buried fears are that of hunger, and of unwanted children. But the blessings are sharp survival techniques and a lot of sharp and good-humored language: never give up, the moment you become stubborn, not malleable or soft, or vital, you are done for.

We had a flood in the building, maybe because of bombings maybe somebody was absent-minded, maybe it is all my fault. I feel guilty anyway, and responsible, more than ever, but impotent.

I feel sick somehow: emotionally and physically, I feel like sleeping and sleeping forever, until the peace comes back.

Today Primakov is in Belgrade, the Russian foreign minister. I dare not share any hope with my need for hope. I stand immobile at a certain reality point trying to establish it every day anew, to fix it, nail it and act upon it.

March 31st, 1999

Fear has entered in my mind: I don't know if I dare think what I do, I cannot cope with reality: is it possible that we are all sacrificed for somebody's lack of political judgement, or worse, madness. I am censoring my thoughts afraid to think in personal tones, afraid to be heard, judged and executed. The conflict is escalating, the atrocities are daily happenings. I think of buying some pills for calming down, sleeping and sleeping, maybe forever, if it comes to atrocities. And I think of it rationally, not with pain, not with pathos. I am a well-organized person, especially in critical situations. I hate the fear in the movements and the eyes of people around me, I avoid them and spend time with children,

they cannot have that kind of fear yet, or is it that they didn't lose it yet, after surviving birth?

My head and language are getting stiff, they have to incorporate all these controversial meanings; I despise getting along in war, no space for feminine language, no free space. The fear is male-gendered, I can tell that, and our male persona suffers from it, even if we are women, acting as such.

Women from women's groups and NGOs are rescuing Albanian women with families from Pristina in flames and terror: risking their lives, as usual, as in the previous wars. Yes, the new feeling I have this morning is that it will end, it must and it will, with or without us, the so-called details...

April 1st, 1999

We spent last night in a shelter, three grownups, five children and two dogs. Actually it is a private house with a good cellar next to a very decent deep underground station where I spent the first night Belgrade was bombed, mostly inhabited by gypsies and mothers with small children. Our group was a large family, a psychological family, we make a group on a psychological not a biological basis. Our group was based I think on fear of being hit by a NATO bomb or some local warrior. Yesterday a band of very primitive vandals was roaring through the city destroying windows and screaming at whomever they felt was different. But then police with shields scattered them: finally the police were doing what I expect them to do. In 1997, during the demonstrations those shielded policemen were on the other side from where I stood. I realized I have no weapons in case somebody attacks me, the only thing I could take was a bottle opener and I did, wondering, would I be able to stick it into somebody's flesh if I was attacked. If my child was attacked I could do anything, so I thought, maybe it is better not to take it with me.

We heard that downtown Belgrade was supposed to be bombed last night: it wasn't, so again we have to wait. My neighbors, refugees from Knin, said: I wish it was us tonight, so we can sleep tomorrow. The wife said: if something happens to my sons, I will kill him, it was him, my man who never wanted to go abroad, he wants to be a Serb among Serbs. And here we are, for the second time bombed to death. I said, it is not the same, she said: for me it is. I realized, for her it was, her script of history contained no other pattern than

extermination. It is not paranoia, it is not lack of information. It is her life, who can deny her life in the name of Truth.

Last night we were expecting bombs in Belgrade downtown, CNN said so. Instead, three American soldiers were captured by the Yugoslav army, again, CNN says so. It is a dirty dirty war, I say, frightened people in basements, bruised soldiers on TV without names, Albanian refugees crying on TV, all the time saying all those things people should never have to say, especially not in TV. Human dignity is here at stake, in all of us, actors and onlookers.

My friend, a half Albanian, half Serbian Yugoslav who lives in New York, phones me: she says, I am living your European time here, I wish I was there with you. But we here are living the American time, awake during the nights, dozing during the day: I guess we are living both times all the time. Tonight if the sirens go on, we may or may not go to the shelter: it has become as a Russian roulette choice, a matter of luck. Phase three says, targets in Belgrade downtown, who knows when, so we people in Belgrade can feel the same way as the refugees in Kosovo. But people in Belgrade know nothing about the refugees, only we few who already feel bad and guilty about refugees and Albanians and the war and the world as it is.

Today the sirens gave us more time: I washed my hair, I felt like an Albanian refugee in a safe haven, so NATO's message has reached me. Another thing: every evening, at dusk, my hands start to tremble without control. It goes on for a few hours. I heard that some other women have the same symptoms of fear of air raids after dusk. Men behave differently, they raise their voices and have more opinions than usual on matters of life and death. We are afraid of their death more than of our death, which we do not think of. Only in certain moments, images of violence against my children strike me hard: I nearly faint of pain. I think I prefer suicide to this. Yes, I am ready for suicide now, in case... in certain cases... But I guess suicide is a luxury in certain cases, one needs to plan that luxury. I do.

They ask me for an analytical comment for the Guardian: I cannot do that in this moment, who can, probably nobody. I think I cannot do it anyway because I don't believe in my ability to think ahead; if I had had it deep down inside me as I have some other abilities, like to sing or to dance, I wouldn't have been here now. My parents are alone in their flat, they hardly hear the alarm, they watch official TV and every now and then phone me,

saying: don't worry it will be OK. And I feel better, the voice of my father calms me, as when I was a kid, he gives me security, I don't give that kind of security to my children. On the contrary, it is a choice not to: this world is not a safe place.

I heard that the French, German, American, British cultural centers, in the center of Belgrade are completely demolished, I don't want to see the debris, nobody is collecting it, it is a new war sculpture, a public corpse, a warning, a reality we are invited to live with every moment.

Some of the graffiti's and badges: The bridge has fallen, long live the bridge, Adolph Goebbels Clinton, Clinton, Serbia is not your Monica, NATO troops kiss my ass, I want to go to school, Only your brain is invisible, Who sings has no bad thoughts, Clinton learn how to sing, NATO in mud, New American Terrorist Organization, We are simply the best.

Some Yugoslav pilots are honored publicly on TV by our President; tomorrow we see in the papers on the obituary page that they are dead.

We have to speak up, to speak out. If we stay silent, if we get frightened -- and it is normal to be frightened and silent -- we have no future, we will lose our future as well as our country or voice. So become writers, become singers everybody, people from the streets, underground, in the refugee convoys, in the queues...in armies, in all those ridiculous places where you feel safe when the alarm goes on...

When the little girl jumps in the flat above me, my stomach turns up and down: how ridiculous, as if the bombs were so tender as to tickle my stomach from inside. Glass explodes, furniture overturns, people think of volcanoes, earthquakes and other natural catastrophes, incredulous that men can do to each other such mean things.

April 2nd, 1999

Today is Catholic holy Friday, people are getting mystical about it, because of the bombs. They see good and bad signs everywhere, in the pattern of days, clouds preventing air strikes, the celestial signs of a destiny. Another blow to the common sense of a common person.

The son of my friend phoned last night from the battlefield: he could hardly speak, he said he was somewhere not saying where and that he was OK but that some of his friends were not so. The age limit for the volunteers who want to join the war has been raised to 75 for men. What about women, no age limit, often they are even louder in their patriotism.

Arkan the indicted war criminal is promising on CNN lawful and merciful procedure for the three American soldiers: this is freedom of the press. Children are getting sick in the shelters, grown ups are emotionally distressed, our day/night schedule has tightened: we plan by the minute our stay out of home and as the night falls, we plan where and how to spend the night, sharing information we had during the day.

Radio B92 is definitely closed, lawfully, a court decision has been made, new people have come, demanding the old ones to collaborate, it happened in the last few years to other independent papers. And still new papers spring up. My hope speaks, you cannot stop creativity. It is pretty much the same everywhere in the world: even where you have absolute freedom, you cannot guarantee creativity. I watch the sea of refugees orchestrated from both sides on the borders with Yugoslavia, Macedonian, Albania. It reminds me very much of the scene I saw in '95, when Serbs from Krajina poured into Serbia for days and days, without resistance, thoughts, or ideas of what and why has happened. I had the feeling it was orchestrated, everything except for the pain and actors themselves, they were natural.

April 3rd, 1999

It is morning, a beautiful sunny morning. I am crying, I am relaxing. Last night the center of Belgrade was bombed with appalling precision, yes the military targets, but only 20 meters from one of the biggest maternity hospitals in the Balkans, the one where I was born and years later gave birth. The destroyed building was the Ministry of the Interior: some of my friends remember being interrogated there. I am relieved and happy with NATO's precision, it was even raining. But I feel visible, exposed to those young responsible pilots who carry their cargo wondering will they make it to hit the military building without doing wrong to a new born baby. They were all in shelters, the babies and the mothers, and I am crying, relieved, all this matter of life and death reminds me of a delivery, of my delivery, of being brave and crying at the same time. I wonder, which

words can describe the relief of staying not only alive but not crippled or bitter, but physically and emotionally integral.

I heard that in a village near Belgrade, a small village on the Danube in Vojvodina, peasants are looking for the American pilot. They are organized in an all-out war, a partisan guerilla action, ridiculous and most serious, as some 60 years ago or as in a film. I asked why in that village? My friend from that village said: probably they are doing it in all villages, all over Yugoslavia. And what would you do to the pilot if you found him, I made an inquiry, among children, among the researchers. Nothing, of course, they all said. Some would give him food and preach about the big Serbian people, mostly the grown-ups, whilst the children would feed him and hide him in a cellar. From whom, I asked. From everybody, like a favorite toy.

What a virtual, playful, cruel war. There can be wars lived from inside or from outside: as a matter of proper fantasy, or epic history. Or you can do it both all the time. Personally, my war is a horrid war, made of terrible images of the killings of my dearest and torture and rape ... Those images haunt me when the alarm goes off, it is them that made my hair go white, in one night, last night. The first time I got white hair was ten years ago, at the border with Slovenia, when a drunken customs' officer harassed us because we were Serbs from the still existing federation called Yugoslavia. I knew that was only the beginning, as I know that this is the end, I hope not only for me but for all of us. I feel solidarity with all people in war in every century or country. We receive emails from all over the world from such people, people in war or who have been in war. But then, who hasn't, it is only now our turn. A bad, bad world.

On BBC, CNN, SKY TV commentators already speak of the war as a chess game between a very talented human, FRY, and a big humanized but imperfect machine, NATO, praising the skill of human all the time as well as finding flaws in the high technology, thanks to the human enemy. And then the refugees, and then our heavy nights, but nobody really tries to put that picture together.

I am supposed to go to Budapest with my daughter: I am wondering is it safe, the roads, and then in Budapest, whom can I turn to, will I be just a Serb or somebody with a face and a story. Years ago, in '92, as a well-off refugee, I spilled many tears because of the offences I had to put up with. It was more than I could bear, I just ran back home, whatever

it would be like. Probably I was spoiled but then, frozen bank accounts, a severe if not impossible visa regime, not even the cheapest jobs available clearly pointed out that we were even less wanted than refugees from other countries, if wanted at all. All the lack of love I suffered in the past came back to me as a wave of unbearable pain, I wished I wasn't born. Now, that kind of exile I cannot stand anymore, that life is too degrading for my child. I prefer hunger and danger, it keeps you vital, it doesn't destroy the human side to war.

April 4th, 1999

Again a night in the shelter. Two more bridges have been struck down towards Hungary and the railroad towards Montenegro is destroyed in the Bosnian territory by SFOR troops. Facts that make me claustrophobic: the wire is finally visible around our zoo in the cage. Wild bad Serbs from 13th century, some disguised in jeans, most speaking THE language (English), but still different, aliens. This NATO strategy is completely in line with local nationalists, who said when the maternity hospital suffered the concussions from nearby bombs our babies didn't even cry, because they are Serb babies, different from all other babies in the world. Well, I am not a baby, but I cried yesterday like crazy, hearing the song "Tamo daleko", (There, far away ,there far away is Serbia). It is a beautiful sad song from World War One, when Serbian soldiers went to Greece, to Thessalonika to retreat, and only a few came back. My grandfather was one of them. When he came back, my mother was born, whilst all of his children were born much before. When I was a kid he used to sing me that song, when I grew up I sang that song abroad when asked to sing a Serbian song. It is the only Serbian song I know how to sing and make people cry; yesterday thousands of people sang it on the Square of Republic during the daily concert. But I couldn't sing it anymore, this is not my song anymore, this is not my Serbia anymore, not the one that my grandfather fought for. Far, far away is my Serbia, I am now in my own country in a cage and in exile.

I am supposed to get 40 liters of petrol per month for my car, but I have nowhere to go, maybe I will exchange it for 40 liters of wine and 40 packages of cigarettes, which are impossible to buy. Maybe in this way I will find again in my own room, in my head, my homeland, my Serbia.

My father dreamed all last night that he was saving me from the bombs, he was sleepwalking as he used to do when he was young, taking me as a baby in his arms and rushing to the door. It went on for years, his war trauma, until it stopped with this new war. He passed it on to me, I started dreaming his dream. Last night when he took back his dreams and fears from me, I slept heavily. It is definitely not the same war, and our dreams are not the same, his dreams are male, mine are female. At least that.

Today I am going to visit them, my parents, they are only 15 minutes on foot from my place, in the center of Belgrade, too, but since the war started, I haven't managed to go and see them. It seems distant and dangerous, as if in another city, not only another district. Is that how are we going to live, as in a labyrinth, divided in districts, as if they were different states, divided cantons? A NATO officer looking at the map of Belgrade and pointing where they are going to strike said, Belgrade is a lovely city, I used to go often to Belgrade. Yugoslavs had good lives, skiing in Austria, travelling all around the world without visas. We want them that way again if they change. But I don't want to live as Yugoslavs lived once, it was a big lie, a big illusion, and I am Ibsen's Nora who lost her world in one second of truth, starting life anew, as cruel as it must be.

I hear people say, it is not the bombs I am afraid of, but the sirens I cannot stand anymore. My neighbor who complained about our loud music now is complaining about it being foreign, aggressor's music. The crack in the time, back to the future: the fifties?

One second I forgot what happened to us. The next second a commonplace occurred to me: we had a life we didn't appreciate, we quarreled, complained, made each other suffer, and now all the veils have fallen, we are united in love and suffering. Pain it is, I know, but is it love?

April 5th, 1999

Today I feel like Rubliov. I don't want to write, I've seen too much pain and suffering too close, my language will be silence, and blank space. Whatever I do or say doesn't count anyway. I don't want to be anybody's accomplice in living and writing as if everything was OK.

One day, somebody, maybe I, will make a bell out of the memory of these null days, like the boy that makes Andrei Rubliov speak up again. Last night when we spoke about personal, moral and public war, I thought I was Rubliov's boy who would make the bell notwithstanding the war. But this morning I woke up the invisible anonymous girl I always was and still am; the magic lasted only until the first low flight planes thundered over our heads at dawn.

The most terrible thing in a way is that after all, nothing really happens: in the morning we are alive, we have food, we have electricity, we have even luxury articles like whiskey... But in a way, we were there, where it all happened, once again not us but to somebody else. As in false executions we survive our own death every night, our fantasizes of the death of our beloved, with more no physical evidence than a few more white hairs...

The nationalist/patriotic heat around me makes me bear even worse the planes above my head and flames in front of my eyes. I am cut off emotionally from my own body, afraid of physical pain, least of empty big ideas like clouds. On the other hand, I fear that until the bad guys come to your door and take you away, we will not know who the bad guys are or believe it happened really to our neighbors.

I entered a pharmacy, the shelves were full, fuller than ever, but you couldn't get aspirins or tranquilizers, and everybody was asking for those. The supplies were out.

Another detail: sweet shops are full, people are buying sweets like crazy, emotional distress, lack of love...

April 6th, 1999

Today is the anniversary of the bombing of Belgrade in 1941 by Hitler. However, the major damage to Belgrade happened at the end of the war from the allies bombing, the so called liberation or Britain bombs. I know everybody today here will use this parallel to feel better or worse, whatever... I remember an old librarian whose fiancée died in the first bombing of Belgrade; he never married but became a priest. That story impressed me more than the personal stories of lost lives, furniture and goods I heard from my close family.

I was sitting on the terrace this morning, the sun was bathing me with great love, I was dreaming of the sea and the clear sky of which we spoke last night waiting for air raids on

the terrace, while the planes were flying over our heads. And the planes came again. But they didn't bomb Belgrade last night: again other places, other victims. I feel so guilty, more than ever this morning for this Other. My friends and enemies from all over the world ask me, do you realize how terrible it is in Kosovo? I do, I really do, and I feel guilty that we feel bad here without having the horror they do. But our war, for the past 10-50 years has always been this kind of invisible horror, we have still a long way to run to the catharsis, to be free from our bad conscience, wrong myths, inertia...

I feel we are being cut away from the rest of the world, more bridges down, more friends and enemies pointing out to us here how bad we are, more crazy people here making careers on screaming how we are heavenly people. And the people? They are in cellars or just in beds waiting for nothing.

I dreamed last night of bombs falling in my cellar, in my bed and afterwards feeling relieved and free. I should stop writing, I hate my dreams, thoughts and words. But it is a vice.

April 7th, 1999

Running to shelter with food, running out of the shelter to buy food. It is spring, who cares. Phoning friends and relatives, exchanging needs, goods, fears, information: who where when was hit, who is next. Never a why. I don't watch news anymore, I hate them all, all sides, all truths. They seem too true for me, I have no distance.

Yugoslavia is crumbling, what a pity for all those bridges. Bridges always send good messages: people building, crossing bridges...

Victims? I don't know, what a pity for all those wasted innocent lives because only few people couldn't find proper words...

Is this my future, running into and out of a shelter, as a rat? The schools are closed, children have serious grown up eyes and lives: in and out of the shelters. Is this our future?

April 8th, 1999

Last night we sat on the terrace waiting... We heard a few big detonations. My right ear became deaf and it hurt, as if travelling in a plane. We started to bet, my absolute pitch won me the bet, and of course my female body as the pain map of world: a government administration building was hit in downtown Belgrade, only half a mile away from us. Nobody really knows why that building and not the general headquarters as was expected. Nobody tells us either anything: call it civil or military target. Anyway , good, we are done with that, we've been waiting for that for days, we from downtown Belgrade. We started laughing with relief when we heard there was no collateral damage, as NATO calls the dead, by the Criminal Aggression, as TV Serbia calls the NATO. My father's voice was trembling, he heard nothing, he saw nothing, he is already deaf and old to move: but he kept saying: "what can we do now, nothing, can we? I thought it was the frying pan falling in the kitchen but then it was bombs, what can we do now?"

Last night the daily rock and folk concert moved to the bridge, the bridge over Sava that brings together, new and old Belgrade. We are all split families between new and old Belgrade, we dare not cross the bridge in order to stay with your part of the family, in case the bridges are struck down.

Yesterday a football game was held between Greek and Yugoslav teams: it was a big national event, people were crying, singing, kissing, and the players hardly played the game. I always thought that the energy of football audiences was wasted, finally they got a humane cause: to stop the war.

A BBC military commentator spoke about Serbian people as horrible and incredible people who care about nothing except their own lives. I was very much hit by his remark, I don't like to praise or degrade any people ethnically or globally. I never realized there is something like British people, even though I spent 12 years in a British boarding school but after his remark I did. I wonder what would British people be like in Albanian or Serbian conditions.

So much comes out of all of us in these border situations, so many discoveries: I realized that my fear, the enormous fear I deal with every night when the sirens go on, could be only balanced by some act of heroism. If I only knew what to do to stop the war...

The Gypsy woman from the basement next door, my old friend, is rather stable since the bombings started: her only distress seems to be the fact that we can't buy cigarettes anymore. She asks me every time I pass by for a cigarette. Her speeches now are balanced and wise, no more foul language, curses, personal offences. Instead of going to a lecture of the Alternative Belgrade University, The reasons of NATO Aggression on Yugoslavia, I listened to her, Mica. I didn't like the title of the lecture, whilst she uses big words together with small ones. The margin between her Gypsy girl and me white girl now is minimum, we both live in basements, on too many emotions, with too few cigarettes and too much beer...

A Gypsy boy asked me for a dime, I said I just gave it to my girl. He asked me when do we paint our Easter eggs. I said, I don't know, I am an atheist, but I will dye my hair for Easter, it has gone surprisingly white these days.

April 9th, 1999

I remember, shortly before the war, this date was the considered a good timing to make your baby if you want to have it born the first day of January 2000. I remember how silly and ridiculous it was, I remember how suggestive it was too. Now, when the day has come nobody in this part of the world has these plans anymore: amidst the small talk over what will happen if ground troops enter Yugoslavia women are hoping they are not pregnant, or wondering what to do with their children if they have to take up the guns. Already two of my girlfriends, pacifists, feminists, said that if it comes to an all against all ground war they will take up guns instead of staying back home and waiting to be killed, raped, or sent in exile. I thought of having a child, but then I remembered another woman who had just her baby before the air raids started. She is in the cellar all the time taking tranquilizers and her baby is sick: she didn't improve or stop the political situation by having a baby at the wrong time in the wrong place, on the contrary, she made it visible, the wrong place and wrong time and wrong deeds.

Military logic is entering our everyday language, I never liked computer games or even field competitive sport: when competition enters my mind I feel paralyzed, I feel different from other people not worse or better. We speak about adapting to war conditions, finding new work, new ways of relaxing, socializing. My friend, a university professor, says she will clean houses for old people, my other friend is working with Gypsy children. I think of

starting a school for our loose children who are suddenly without any daily duties or working habits, being until two weeks ago urban school children fighting with institutions for their own identities, not prepared for war catastrophes or survival situations.

But the main point today is that, ground troops or not, we don't care about our personal lives anymore: most of us don't go to shelter, don't think of leaving the country... We are just being here, who cares for how long, we have no decent way out, we are hostages of our own life without power.

April 10th, 1999

Today I decided to clean the house. The hairdresser next door opened and is working his usual hours, notwithstanding the alarm which went off today even during daylight. The pilots were probably "frustrated" last night for not dropping their bombs. The NATO briefing will be tense, military commentators will speculate on the new world order, but we had a peaceful night: no boom booms, only local aircraft which has a more humane sound, as planes used to have.

Tomorrow is Orthodox Easter: my daughter painted the eggs. We are not religious, we never were. She said, I am bored; I thought better let her do constructive things than sulk alone in her room waiting for the alarm. She is a child of the war, who knows, maybe she is God's child too. She said yesterday, I have a feeling I will be killed when I am sixteen, so why bother to go to school anymore. I froze and just said: you will go to school anyway.

April 11th, 1999

Just a small Easter thought: if somebody is killing, raping, ethnically-cleansing Albanians, why should I be spared of it? My friend, a very decent person, cannot believe it is happening; as far as I am concerned I believe everything too much.

Last night at midnight Belgrade was on foot, sirens were on but still people were crowding in the churches, around the churches for the midnight service: the Easter service. I was looking at the people: old, simple and poor ragged people, young and middle-aged snobs and then the fewest, those who really believe. All crowding together with the same tragic expression in their face, as in an staged opera in La Scala.

On the other hand, at the same time on the bridge crossing the Sava, the concert, rock folk whatever, was raging, people were angry, patriotic, believing in their power instead of God's.

I couldn't find my place on either side: I don't believe in God but I don't believe in myself against the world as it is. I am afraid when the alarm is on, I don't want my children to risk anything for anybody. So I went to the video club and took some films to watch. It was a Mickey Rourke film, my favorite actor until 18 days ago: he was so foolish, I thought, he knew nothing of my life anymore, he doesn't love me anymore, so I couldn't pay him back with adoration. We don't share the crucial experience of my life, so Mickey Rourke and I had to split after so many years...

I went to bed early and slept like a log, my fridge emits terrible sounds, worse than air raids, so I decided to switch it off and clean it today, even though it is bad omen to clean on Easter, my granny used to say.

When I was five my granny took me for Easter to church, secretly, so that my parents, communists wouldn't know. I remember the secrecy, the fear and excitement on entering the biggest building I ever saw in my life, smelling of strange odors and glimmering with candles, from roof to the pavement, all round me. After the first moment of joy, I remember this feeling that until today never abandoned me when entering a church: the feeling of nothingness, powerlessness, invisibility of my little person. I started crying like crazy, in a fit, saying to my granny, I will be burned, I will be punished... She took me out, much in distress over her failed mission. She bought me an ice cream and a toy dog. Never again did we speak about Easter or church. Not until many years later did I enter a church again, the feeling was pretty the same, but I was stronger, my mystical crisis was over, not resolved, but over. And my granny wasn't alive anymore to give me an answer or comfort.

April 12th, 1999

I couldn't go to sleep last night, finally I took a tranquilizer, there it goes, I started too. I postponed all these weeks the use of drugs to stay normal, but I see that no normal person can stay normal without drugs, if you want to stay here. I don't want to go, I don't want to leave my city, my friends, my streets, my habits, my language. I don't believe in Other: I understand those who left, out of fear, out of needs, I could have been one of them too, but

I want to stay. Friends from all over the world offer me flats, money, help... But the only thing I need from them and from others all over the world is to try to stop our war.

During the day we live the Serbian war: new identity cards, walk on bridges, solidarity among hurt people... During the night we have the NATO war: detonations, fires, shelters...

Yesterday a journalist was killed in the center of Belgrade, in front of his house, in the middle of the day. Is this war too, and whose war is this now? Who's next?

Kids go to discotheques during the day, they make parties during the day. They say: who knows, maybe this will be our last bit of fun.

Other factories were destroyed last night, petrol storage, again Pancevo and Novi Sad, two cities with such peaceful and easygoing people, for the past few years full of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. I have friends in both towns, one of them emailed me: yes we will go on with work for our international summer schools, they are more important than ever. But at this moment we have dead people here although we, at the peace movement are still all alive... He is much better than me, I don't want to go on with international summer schools, I don't want to fake normal life: we will need years to get out of this mess, out of destruction, fear and anger, and I will take my time...

Last night an old man next door was taken to the hospital, during the intensive air raids. He was tied to a chair and carried out of his flat; he politely said, Good night. I guess it was some kind of nervous breakdown: alone, all these weeks, he couldn't take it anymore. Better a crowded hospital.

An old woman I know stopped eating: she is a communist since 1930. One of the few honest people I know, nevertheless not less dogmatic. I can imagine the questions and answers that find no sense in her head; her body reacted.

April 13th, 1999

The old man next door who said good night died: good night ladies, good night my sweet ladies.

Today I watched TV: the woman with a scarred face from the train hit by NATO bomb

answered the question: what do you think of this NATO aggression. "I just went to visit my relatives for Easter".

I refuse to give interviews and opinions on what is going on. I am just like the woman with the scarred face, a political idiot, where idiot stands for what it meant in ancient Greece: a person who to whom information is denied: at that time most of men and all of women. Today, all of us, all over the world.

Humanitarian aid is a big business. There will be a lot of opportunity to do business for the next 20 years at this scene of the crime. I hope I won't be here to witness anybody's sense of guilt.

My young friend from Pancevo writes to me, they are hit nearly every night because of the factories: we are still alive, the same as I write to my friends abroad... He goes on; I am lobbying against military logic all over the world. Think positively. Obviously I am not thinking positively, but somebody must think negatively, too. Usually women do it.

I saw the buses of relatives and doctors leave from the center of Belgrade to the place where the train was hit on the bridge: nobody was crying or being emotional. I looked at myself passing a window; I have changed, too. I don't cry anymore, I sleep during the raids, I work during the day, I laugh. When you get used to it, there are fewer chances to end it, you simply forget how and why...

April 14th, 1999

A very strong detonation, from nowhere woke me up: that will be my day, just a way to calm down. Instead of writing, cooking and who knows maybe reading, it will be just compulsive movements to calm down the pain in my stomach.

I look at the photo of my cousin who died only few months ago of AIDS: finally after three weeks, tears come back to my eyes. The new moment is that I am happy her agony wasn't longer: poor, sick and spoiled as she was she would have suffered even more this barbarian historical moment.

A true crack in the time: we are going back to forties, old men from World War II are commanding young people who know nothing about war except to die. Somebody spoke

today about dangerous dreams of the forties: destruction and reconstruction. I remember how my Italian communist friend speaking about revival fashion said: the forties are my time, the age of reconstruction, starting from nothing, making your life new...

April 15th, 1999

In the middle of the night the windows started to rattle violently as in a horror movie and the sky was full of fire: my daughter woke up and screamed and clung to me. She is bigger than I am now but she had all of a sudden the body of a baby. I was so tired emotionally that I could hardly open my eyes. She was afraid but she didn't want to move from her bed, go to the shelter... She asked me, what is this now, why all this noise. I said it is our army darling, don't be afraid. It was the first time since the war started that I made a difference between the weapons and it was only to calm her not because I believe in it.

Yesterday there were more than 1000 people attending the funeral of the killed journalist with three bullets in the back of his head: a signed, professional murder. Stories about his death are even worse than this cold blooded killing The more stories I hear the less I am convinced there is any story to it: he was a brave, intelligent, powerful, good looking man: I guess that is enough...

Horrible, horrible pictures of refugees killed by bombs in the convoy in Kosovo. Horrible NATO definition of collateral damage to the targeted military convoy. I saw some soldiers here in Belgrade: they were young, very worried, awkwardly carrying the big guns. I can imagine them in a convoy, during the night, in the woods in Kosovo: all these city boys could be my sons...

April 16th, 1999

I started this diary, my war diary, on March 17th, 1998, more than a year ago when the conflicts in Kosovo began. The title of my diary: Normality; a Moral Opera by a Political Idiot. I can hardly remember my life before I started thinking in this way. I can hardly remember my life before the bombing of Yugoslavia started on March 24th. But I insist; I don't want to go back, only ahead. At literally any price. I cannot pretend that I don't know the things I saw in the past few weeks, years...

Last night panic struck my household: the noises and lights of the Yugoslav artillery covered the sky over Belgrade as in a military parade whilst literally 300 NATO planes were flying over the city, again as in a military parade. Children started screaming, out of fear and joy, like at a circus. I ushered them in a great hurry to our local shelter: I drank wine quickly to stop my hands and knees trembling and then we went back home where, as the children say, they feel best. We slept like logs.

My friend says who is a University professor of chemistry and has traveled a lot said: I don't know any place in the world that has such wonderful microcosms and such a terrible macrocosm, as Belgrade, Yugoslavia. My other friend said; I hope the war spares Belgrade and its atmosphere, we saved it already once in '92, unarming the uniformed violent people from all over ex Yugoslavia with this easygoing Belgrade atmosphere. Yesterday we went shopping: the shops are full and the prices are going down, especially clothes. People have no money to buy anything anymore; those who have some keep it for the future hardships. We called it the last shopping. I always hated shopping for clothes but yesterday I enjoyed it, maybe because I believed it is the last.

We heard on radio that kids will not have to pass a state exam for entering high school: the joy among them is enormous. It was a wrong and hard exam but these kids are happy without any exams, any school, anything anymore. They say, don't you see now that going to school was useless: other things matter, like power, money... They don't connect knowledge with power and money, not after this war.

People from abroad ask me, how are Serbian people taking the death of the bombed refugees? What a question! The same as all other civilian deaths, too many which have occurred in this 'humanitarian bombing'. It never occurred to me to think of dead civilians as Albanian or Serb. But obviously people from NATO countries feel differently. And maybe they should: it is their bombs, their tax money, as citizens from democratic countries usually say. They can also choose their victims.

Another anniversary, April 16th is the Easter day when Belgrade was bombed by the allies in order to be liberated at the end of the war. Let's not abuse the parallels to feel better, to feel worse. In those days a thousand people were killed in Belgrade, a maternity hospital was hit, not mine, the second biggest in the region and 15 new born babies were hit. In our war today the babies were in the cellar and the hospital wasn't hit; let's hope it stays so,

let's hope that "humanitarian" bombs really bring us peace, and not only the peace after death.

April 17th, 1999

An American journalist quoted a humanitarian Australian worker in Kosovo who said: Thanks NATO for bombing us, for destroying our blankets and medicines. A NATO officer replied at the press conference: sorry but our maps are old.

A village peasant woman at the market who is selling me homemade cheese says: they are bombing us every day, getting the hell out of us, everything is destroyed. Can't somebody tell them that it's been two years now that the army has moved out of our village.

I guess it is old maps again.

Last night Belgrade was spared from bombs, but the weather is terrible today, it's raining, gusts of wind are hitting the windows, glass is trembling and parts of facades of old buildings are breaking and falling with thunder: people don't want to go out because of the weather, but they go out to see the bombs falling. I don't know why. A young soldier who survived four years of war in Krajina told me: never go out to watch the bombs fall, it is not good for your nerves and you have still a long way to go. I follow his advice. I go out in the rain but never during the bombings.

People are depressed, really and truly: I hear more and more stories about people not wanting to get out of their beds: no place to run, no place to hide. They watch cartoons on TV all day long: no news can reach them or do something good for their lives. Our lives resemble refugee camp stories I collected some years ago, during the last war. I am very active, too active: the other side to depression. I work and function without pleasure at all, as a robot, anxious that all jobs must be done: petty jobs or big jobs, all the same.

April 18th, 1999

It is Sunday, but who knows, who cares: we have been living the same day ever since the war started. Every morning, as in a film I saw recently with Bill Murray, the same rituals, fixed as if in eternity. We try to find space in between, to avoid some small unpleasant detail, but nevertheless, the day will be exactly as it was yesterday as it will be tomorrow...

Yesterday a marathon was held in Belgrade, traditional, under heavy rain... Public traditional wedding in TV... What else, all those efforts, condemned by some, to make life go on... I think that those who can make it should. Personally I am out of everything that resembles human life, if I could choose I would be a cockroach at this point, much safer...

Last night in Pancevo, a few miles away from Belgrade, three factories were hit again: the dangerous one also, as they called it from the first nights of bombings when I was in the underground station, and there was an acid leak. Some people are evacuating. We in Belgrade had a good wind, we are lucky once more, but the fortunes of a gambler aren't something I would base my life on if I had a choice.

In Batajnica, near the airport, a three-year-old girl has been killed by the explosion of window glass in a detonation. She was very spoiled, her father said. She said I want to go to the bathroom, then she said, I don't want to, and after I let her go in, she never came out. I know for myself how terrible it is to have spoiled children when the bombs set off: they are ashamed of doing such things as sticking tape on the windows, they are ashamed of us doing things so humiliating as survival...

April 19th, 1999

Last night my friends were talking about our future: in very very pessimistic tones. They are all educated people, with no savings, impoverished by the last ten years of economic overturns, people with more or less strong patriotic feelings, from the opposition, but definitely people who for some reason or other do not want to go in exile. The feeling that is getting stronger among common people here since the beginning of this recent war is that nobody really wants us anymore anywhere, maybe not even here. It is a very strange feeling for young or middle aged people, quite common in old people, but not for those who are still strong physically. It is more than a depression, it is a common sense which resembles depression. Texts of famous writers from all over the world speak also about us Serbian people as unable to emancipate, wake up, as accomplices of atrocities, all of Serbs... I won't quote the names, they were people I admired, some were even my friends. I forgive them all, but I refuse to read them or to acknowledge they even exist, as I did some years ago with our local writers who took the aggressive course of nationalism: for me they exist no more...they lost their people, so for whom they are writing now?

April 20th, 1999

Instead of going to the bridges people should guard the factories of potential ecological catastrophes, two of which I hear are very dangerous, and were hit. I hear say that people on bridges are manipulated by parties, that parties are fighting among them to manipulate the same crowds, but I saw their faces, and I am one of them. I don't wear badges, I never wear any public signs, in war or in peace: I feel manipulated to wear Levi on my jeans, I never buy signed clothes nor signed thoughts. But I am as manipulated as people on the bridges, on the streets, in queues for cigarettes, with patriotic or traitor's thoughts. I know it and I am ready to offer my body to protect the dangerous factories or to be a dividing unarmed wall between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. It is a heroic way of being a coward. But nobody gives me, nor people like me any chance.

Some people I know, doing nothing, hearing no news, fearing the future and unable to do anything about it, change their political ideas from left to right in half an hour, during one conversation: educated, intelligent people. Are they manipulated, are they mad, is that the way of being bad Serbs as some abroad call us... I have so many different senses of guilt, private and public, but I also have a global one that incorporates them both when I close my eyes every night in bed. It is a sense that there is something wrong in being exactly the way I am. The fact is that I cannot find anything to love about me, meaning there is nothing I can pass on.

I watch movies in a different way since our war started: I notice that in every exciting film there is at least one scene of true well-represented violence. The emotional impact of art or industry is based on this true shock to your nervous system. That is why I cannot watch movies anymore and can only listen to Requiem by Mozart, because he starts from the point which claims: death has come to get you, be prepared and be happy.

Oh, yes, and something about atrocities, about Albanian refugees... Please, all of you who are reading this understand that I accept all the blame as much as you want me to. I know what is going on, even if I have no proofs but what some people say, as I am saying all these things about my life, expecting you to believe me. Now, what is my cross: NATO bombs, Serbian patriotic death. OK, between compulsive patriotism and compulsive sense of guilt, I guess there is no way out. It would take another lifetime to do so.

And between claims that chemical factories have been hit together with a tobacco factory and claims that it hasn't been so, there is not much space: we have to breathe air, drink water. Even if we don't have to smoke cigarettes the smoke in the air, over the water and woods will cover all sides, in and without uniforms, good or bad ones...

April 21st, 1999

Last night Novi Belgrade was hit, the building formerly of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, today of new power, new TVs, new parties, new business firms... Yesterday the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church was in Belgrade, the guest of all the officials. Opposition parties and the people were asked to walk in the streets without party signs, without even a flag, but with a candle in one's hand. I decided not to go out at all, afraid that the crack in the time will eat me. Power and the people of power are changing their faces and places: you cannot recognize them easily anymore, once they were communists and religious people at least, now they are all everything, taking each other's words and places. Every morning the news, more places hit, less things to hear, it seems all the same, sometimes even the targets are literally the same, if not the pictures we see, first on local TV then on foreign TV taken from the local. We are turning to books and chess and cards: long days and nights ahead of us, without TVs, bridges, roads, visas, but among friends and relatives. Now that is crack in the time, it did get me, and it is the fifties, the years in which I was born I am now living as an adult. My parents are getting younger and I am getting older, actually now we are not only of same flesh and blood, but of same age and time.

April 22nd, 1999

Every night I drink wine in order to go to sleep, I give it even to the children so that their sleep is deeper and the detonations are shallower. But my dreams speak of what my mind refuses to know: last night I dreamt that somebody was going to set up my daughter to be involved in the murder of the Colorado high school pupils. I dreamt of a photo of the two killers/boys with my daughter's face in the middle. She knows nothing of it; I know too well that she is in the photo because she is Serbian. Now, I don't believe in that kind of rubbish, you have prejudices everywhere, even when you think you don't; but then, this

morning I saw on CNN how Serbian children were harassed in a American school for being Serbs, for being responsible for Serbian policy. I don't like my dreams, I don't like my reality, I will try tonight without wine, and without sleep...

Last night the president's residence was hit and destroyed: no comment. Does anybody really want my comment? The official TV is giving pictures of the destroyed villa in a long dumb silence, the foreign TVs take it personally. Again, we political idiots have a specific dimension. I thought immediately of the mother of my friend abroad, an old woman who lives alone in that neighborhood. She definitely was in her house, she doesn't have shelters or other options. I know her history, because of her father's house in that residential power zone. All the people in power when they came to power wanted to get rid of her. But for four generations now the family has managed to keep their house, against all, now finally against NATO. I wish that women like her would win all the wars.

April 23, 1999

I guess you all know, the TV building was hit last night. My window burst open from the blast, I live quite near whilst my parents are just behind. A very good friend of mine lives in the building next to it. We are all okay except for the sacrificed TV workers, common craftsman who had no ideas about what the program should look like. I am okay but the people in the market this morning are clearly distressed by their lack of understanding. Just yesterday I thought, now everybody is fighting for our souls, all these TVs, local and international, competing for us Serbs led astray, : we even receive American leaflets from the planes telling us about us... Not even the teenaged killers in Colorado could draw attention from our educational program. My father said: the impact wasn't that bad, the worst part was seeing the decapitated bodies being taken from the TV building. The Serbian TV is broadcasting again, better than yesterday. Some of the foreign journalists who arrived yesterday to report are afraid for their lives. I am afraid for my soul, and yes for my children who walk through the center of Belgrade, next to former TV building. They say some unexploded bombs are still hidden around.

I was in the Greek embassy today: the embassy is open, the consulate is closed. They are the last embassy giving humanitarian visas, with very strict rules. They were nice, tender. It was our people who made me cry. An old lady was repeating, I have to take a cab and go and check if I switched off the lights, I may provoke fire (rules under bombs). But the

alarm is not on, I said. Never mind she said, it may provoke fire. Young, old, middle-aged women of different social backgrounds were smiling all the time at the Greek staff, in order to get a visa, they were pleading, arguing, crying... My God, I don't need that kind of life. I don't need a visa, I asked for my passport back without it: they couldn't find it. So there it is, in trying to be privileged I became a person without identity: I feel free. They will find my passport on Monday, they said, but I won't go anywhere, not leaving my family, friends, who are not as privileged but as humiliated, even for two days. If we have to leave, we will leave all together, as the Albanians did. Dignity and love is the only thing we have yet to lose.

April 24th, 1999

Since the big NATO celebration in Washington is dazzling all the TV channels, we expected the bridges here in Belgrade to be hit, finished off in one big dazzling operation to start anew: the new NATO era. I watched the military waltz, the flags, the uniforms, the audience, the speeches... It was as surreal as our reality here, that of political idiots under bombs. It is not as stern and grave as the commentators claim that the world that NATO is protecting has become, it is funny, surreal, and dangerous. Hostages of both sides, and of bad weather, we stay home and watch the life of the Others on TV, the screen coming and going, depends on which side is militarily stronger at that point.

Belgrade wasn't hit last night, but the alarm was still on: I had a nice sleep. My friend from Rakovica (a severely damaged part of Belgrade) phoned me last night: she is in a nervous breakdown, the window in her bedroom fell on her while sleeping, she is afraid of radioactivity. She wants to have children, to go abroad, but actually her only possibility is to go to a video club and watch films while the bombs are falling around her bedroom.

I think I will stop writing for a while, my life besides repeating itself, has become that of TV programs.

PS I just heard that the people in the TV building were warned by NATO of air strikes but that their orders and decision was to stay. I guess not all. I don't believe in orders, I don't believe in heroism. I always see something else, something ugly behind it which inevitably happens, and usually to those who believe in heroism and orders.

April 25th, 1999

I just saw a film by Peter Weir with Jeff Bridges: the recovery from a posttraumatic shock after a plane crash. I am there, I cannot yet say I was there, I am still there. Now I know it definitely, we are all there, and the ones who are not there yet soon will be, our defenses are falling down, one by one. I am not afraid of death anymore, nor of flights or bombs. I was, my God, I had phobias after an emergency landing in '97 in a Swissair flight which crashed a year later at the same place. I developed phobias when NATO threatened to bomb Belgrade in 92, 95, 98... Now I have planes bombing us and here I am, without phobias, but I am not here I am there, beyond fear of death, with only a strong wish to die together with the ones and life I love.

I am crying with relief every day, not with fear. I am seeing only the people who are sharing or have shared my reality, I am not wasting my life and time anymore. Maybe I will never go back to my old life, but I am not sorry. On the contrary, I am sorry for my wasted time, though fun it was so let it be...

Last night I dreamed that some kind of police, without clear signs, but in uniforms and with weapons, rang the my doorbell: they were coming to get the men. I didn't stir, I didn't breathe, I thought it was real, even this morning I am not sure I dreamt it.

We cannot watch the state TV anymore, since last night: the kids were right, they dreamed of a boom boom, not of police...

Politicians here are speaking of total war, all Serbian blood spilled. People are talking about life without water and electricity; our Bosnian friends are sending us instructions how to survive, I guess, both. Children are playing all day long, we are playing with the children to keep them busy, denied any bigger responsibilities...

I walked on the streets of Belgrade. After many days I dared to look closely at the debris of the bombed building in the center and the faces of the passersby. As to the buildings, I am really not as impressed as I thought I would be. We sat in a café in front of a destroyed building: it felt natural. But the faces of the people: they are long, worried, different, definitely different from the ones I used to see, more or less appealing to my sense of decency. I am glad it happened, I am glad people are finally worried, thinking for

themselves after many many years. My friend who takes care of her very old father said when she heard that the official TV was hit: Oh my God, what shall I do now, without that TV he cries and refuses to use the toilet...

April 26th, 1999

Today is the anniversary of Chernobyl. I remember how hysterical I was about the disaster, I remember how the official TV didn't want to tell us the truth about the level of radiation in order "not to create panic". I remember walking in the rain with my daughter which I later learned was extremely radioactive. I remember wanting to die or to kill somebody for that. I also remember common people calling me mad for taking that kind of stuff seriously, just like today, the madwoman in the attic. I wish my fears didn't come true. Ever since '91 I feared for today, bombs and war on our territory. Then I was a madwoman in the basement, without faith or space, now I am the madwoman in the attic, watching the planes, dreaming of safety in the basement.

The shops here are still full and the green market is rich, but people are talking about radioactive vegetables more and more. They are also speaking of a future without bread, water or electricity. No visible signs of that yet, only fears. The only visible lack are still cigarettes and petrol. And of course peace.

I am sick, I know I shouldn't be. In 1993, when we were under heavy sanctions without medicines, I remember my mother, a chronic asthmatic, saying: well, now we shouldn't get sick until the sanctions are lifted. And we didn't. Children were having operations without narcotics, children I know were dying of leukemia because the medicines couldn't cross the Hungarian border, old people unable to buy their medicines and live decently were committing suicide... Well, the best way is not to get sick as my mother, a doctor by profession, ordered us.

This morning I still could buy a strong antibiotic after I woke up choking with pain and fear of this new illness. It was symbolic, the physical impediment of speech: I was silent, silenced, writing down my needs as a testament. I remembered Freud, dying with throat cancer, emigrating in 1939 from Germany to England. I decided not to let it happen to me. If we have to leave, we will leave all together. I won't leave my men behind to fight somebody else's cause: they are my men, and not just chess players of a Nation-State.

The famous NATO star Jamie Shea, said we, Serbian citizens, feel safe with NATO bombs: we don't stop working when hearing the sirens. Well maybe we don't stop working but that is for other reasons, because the work has to be done not because we feel protected. I don't feel safe with NATO's or any other bombs, NATO's being the only ones I know. I don't feel safe without bridges, in a boat, on a horse, on a bicycle, against a NATO airplane; I don't feel safe without schools, universities, libraries, against highly technological NATO countries. I am not afraid, not anymore, we are beyond good or evil by now, but my legs simply tremble, when I hear NATO's or any other planes with bombs above my head.

April 27th, 1999

Last night I switched on the TV: on ten channels we had the same program, the official news, the ones whose building was destroyed by NATO: the same news the whole day. Between the news we had films and music, different on each channel, but all united every now and then by the same pictures of war.

Then on BBC I saw my friend Vjosa, an Albanian from Kosovo: a human rights activist, a doctor, a beautiful woman. She was telling about all the atrocities that happened to her whilst running for her life from Pristina. I started crying, not for her story or those of some other of our feminist friends, which I already knew, but for her: she has changed, her face has something of a person who will never laugh again, never be superficial... I suppose mine has it too, if I dared to look at myself in the mirror. I remember going to Zagreb with Vjosa and many other women to a feminist conference in 1996. She was taken off the bus by Croatian authorities, along with two Serbian refugees from Croatia, and entrance visas were refused to them only. The rest of us didn't want to go on, but we did, feeling lucky, we, Serbs, finally entered Croatia. The Serbian refugees never got their visa, never got back to their homes: that was the practice of the official policy of 'The return of refugees,' but Vjosa eventually got one. Her only problem at the Croatian border was that she was an Albanian: not a Serb, or a Croat.

I remember being strip searched at the Hungarian border in '93, '94, '95, because I was a Serb. And in other countries. But some parts of Viosa's story go beyond this, I feel deep down in my stomach that it can happen and is happening to everybody, this kind of harassment, notwithstanding the nation but related to a place and a policy: and I am afraid.

Last night, an enormous blast, as if round the corner. Again the former central committee building, across the river in Novi Belgrade. I don't even know what's inside today, but for some reason when it gets hit you can hear it more than much closer targets.

We called our friends and relatives, checked we are alive and went to bed: as the NATO generals say, we feel safe with regular bombs. Our politicians say we must work even harder with NATO bombs.

April 28th, 1999

Last night my friend came over to my place, we were sitting and planning how to go on with our feminist publishing house, '94. The last book we published was *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, two days before the bombing. What would Hannah Arendt say about being published by feminists in the middle of a European war again! We were nervous, it was 1 a.m. and there was no alarm. We didn't know what to do, like many people in Belgrade I have heard: it is called the alarm neurosis. But the explosions immediately came: very strong, the windows opening, the building shaking, fireworks in the air. The Yugoslav aircraft responded heavily and then the thunder and lightning with heavy rain. I think there was also a full moon. We all went to bed together, to one big bed with children's toys and many cushions and we went to sleep. I guess you can call it a 'candid semblance of death...'¹

The cleaning lady came late this morning: she said, no buses, no petrol, I've spent all night in the shelter but I don't believe anymore we will win this war. My friend's child said: Hurrah! We have no music classes anymore, our teacher has become a sniper! I remember the young man, a great talent; he was in the music academy. My friend's son who is serving in the regular army phones regularly: he is afraid and cold, but alive. He takes tranquilizers and smokes cigarettes. She stopped eating and laughs all the time. Then the news this morning: we cannot understand what was hit, we understand that NATO made another mistake in a village of South Serbia: again collateral damage, this time children in a 'safe' shelter. I wonder how many people in Belgrade go to the shelters, I still see groups

¹ _ Dante? Leopardi?

of them in front of it every night, smoking and drinking, but I wonder if it is by now socializing or still true fear.

Petrol rations are 20 liters per month. The market is full of goods of all kinds, of people selling and buying, cash is still available. This kind of war economy we have mastered during these last years and many before that in former Yugoslavia. Petrol on the black market has only doubled. My father tells me what was hit last night: the so called Marshall's house; I don't even know what it is, what is it for, I know it is next to the White Palace, the working place of kings, presidents... One bit of good news: on BBC I see that the Hungarians may be putting up a refugee camp near Budapest. this time for Serbs, though they are treated officially as tourists. I feel safer now, if we have to leave I don't want to go to somebody' s country, somebody's place, on somebody's back. I don't want my child to be looked upon with fear or for her to look back with fear. A Nobody's land with other people in the same situation, children playing in the dust, eating together, speaking openly of their fears. That is the only decent solution for us who have suffered somebody else's war.

All kinds of people, intellectuals, street vendors, taxi drivers are speculating on what is going on in high politics: who will surrender, who will win, inside the country, outside in the big world. I guess it is a situation of interregnum, so everybody may be right even though he doesn't know it yet. My friends from Belgrade and all over the world ask for my diary, daily, so they can cry: that is what most often they say...

I just had a phone call, a friend telling me that an ecological catastrophe is on its way: no more salads, vegetables, fruits, only tinned food and bottled water. What will happen to the market, the only vital place in the war? Many papers have been circulating on e-mail, collecting evidence of the poisoning of air and water. A young friend of mine decided to have an abortion because she believed all that; she's been crying for days now... The alarm again, it is daytime: my daughter phones immediately, she is coming home. That is our deal: until the war is over we will stay together all the time...

April 29, 1999

Another horrible night, again children with teddy bears in our beds. A wonderful sunny morning with no real news... Who cares anymore for my story, I hardly care for my life,

why should somebody else? Foreign friends and journalists urge me to leave, before it is too late, they tell me Serbs are the contemporary Jews. It all passes me by. I am tired, I need to sleep, our torture is that of lack of sleep. Last night my friend told me how she didn't get her monthly pay because her director lost all the money in his distress: his son is in the army in Kosovo. So she doesn't have money for her children. We give each other money as if it were water, for free. We share cigarettes, wine, information and pass it on. Yes, again, the famous Serbian solidarity; I am not a nationalist, on the contrary I am a political idiot and an internationalist but my ideology doesn't bring me food, love, solidarity, which I need most now...

My washing machine broke down, I started crying, as if somebody had died; I imagined myself washing the laundry by hand in addition to all the extra housework I have had to do since the war started. Then I remembered hearing how in NATO phase three we will have no water, electricity, phone lines. So I imagined myself with many others, mostly women, washing the laundry in the Danube as in ancient Greece: singing, gossiping, laughing, with kids running around us as in a Karen Blixen pastoral. That will be my summer holidays...

In 1993, we Serbs in Serbia couldn't buy sugar, coffee, shampoo: we either had no money or there was nothing to buy, or both. We often lived on humanitarian aid packages that refugees in Belgrade from Croatia and Bosnia got from the international community; what is it going to be like now, only we are here, Serbs from Serbia, and we are not supposed to be aided but bombed...

Some foreign journalists complain that their papers don't want to them to write about Serbs in Serbia, but ask them for political analysis which they are not able to do.

A friend of mine couldn't meet me because his father had a heart attack from the heavy bombings. As far as I remember his father said, just before the air raid: let them attack us, we will fight back, and he scorned his son who didn't want to fight. Now his son is risking his life against his will and taking care of his father. I wonder, did the father change his mind?

April 30th, 1999

My friend's son, a soldier somewhere in Kosovo, sent a message: he wants to marry his girlfriend so she can have his flat legally if he is killed.

Step by step, down, down: every day crossing a new border of horror: yesterday's fear is today's habit. Last night a bomb hit only 100 meters from my home. The blast was so strong that the building was shaking for minutes from one side to another; we hung on to each other, over each other laughing nervously. Somebody said: they will kill us all eventually, biologically or physically. Then we went to bed, all together. After few hours no more explosions, but more shaking: again we hung on to each other, sleepy, without saying anything, no news on TV. The earthquakes following the explosion went on and on, we are still shaking and feeling sick.

Never before was Belgrade hit so hard: dead bodies lying around the destroyed buildings, the alarms of destroyed cars pitching strange tunes, rescue vans circling with lights on, full moon. And life goes on, today with no buses or trams, salad and market food forbidden because of the poisoning of earth and air by uranium, no information because it doesn't help anyway.

After 37 days of air strikes, I finally gave in and let my daughter go out during the alarm: only half an hour, but I know that now there is no way back, to normality. Anyway, who here still knows what normality is, we are trying to enjoy whatever is left of our lives, call it what you wish. I feel a very dangerous moment is coming, creeping behind my back, up my spine: the pleasure of risk, of death... The instinct of death is getting stronger with respect to the fear of dying. Fear of death is not the same as fear of dying: the first one brings pleasure, the second depression.

Old people, for years depressed because of their diminished circumstances, without strength, emotions, money or medicine, are now rising from the dead, together with us, the younger ones: every morning all together we rise from the dead.

May 1st, 1999

Being here, still. Notwithstanding whatever, being here. Even if I went away, I would be even more here. Very soon I won't be even able to think of leaving, the last bridges are waiting to fall. And then I will be sure I have no choice, and that I picked up the right one.

Friends, old and new, unknown people are inviting me to save my life and that of my family: I turn them all down with tears. I am moved by their compassion, I would do just the same in their place, feeling guilty for having peace and fun while somebody exactly like me, for some obscure reason in the other part of the world is denied.

Living from day to day, all of us: the market is full as never before, shops close no more except during the bombings, some not even then. But the look in people's eyes is different, definitely not that of some weeks ago: this is true war now. I survived my house shaking from one side to another, waiting to die with my family tight around me, holding hands. I guess that is what I am seeing in other people's eyes. When I walk down the streets, in the beautiful weather and my beautiful city, even in debris, I watch how people move and the places they take to rest: those are safe places. Everybody for some reason thinks that their place is the safest in the world, out of superstition or some very rational arguments. Never mind, everything is permitted to win this war, not the one against NATO, not against any other military force, but within oneself.

Every morning my first thought, as this morning, a traditional international holiday we once used to enjoy, is: are those boys, my friends and relatives still alive somewhere in Kosovo, fighting somebody else's war? (They get one tin, one package of cigarettes, tranquilizers, and five German marks per day.) And then I feel like killing somebody. Ironically, the first time I felt that was when Kennedy was killed. I was very very small, but seeing the pictures in TV -- I was in Cairo -- I learned what revenge is made out and for.

May 2nd, 1999

A TV station, very close to the official one, broadcast yesterday a long dialogue of two Chinese people without any translation. I cannot learn Chinese that quickly, I go out to the video club. In front of the window a group of people are discussing a leaflet which fell on the street, many of them, all over town. As far as I could understand it was a NATO leaflet in bad Serbian saying that the war will be over in 48 hours when the last bridge over the Danube is hit. We will be an island. People were incredulous, common people, confused with Chinese interviews and American leaflets.

I had a nightmare: a big bomb or earthquake swept my house off the ground with my family in it, all of us, even some dead, as in the Wizard of Oz. We flew and flew crazily until we broke through the planet core landing deep down in the heart of the earth. I managed to hang on to a deep tree root: I climbed and climbed, my daughter holding onto me. I managed to find a hole above my head: my hand, as if coming out of a grave, dug a tunnel and I was out, on the surface: I pulled my daughter swiftly and looked deep down behind her: black death, infinity...

A huge blast interrupts my writing: it is 12.20 a.m.

I visited the ruined buildings today. Most of them I never noticed before: mostly ugly, huge, now dead... But I love this city, I love it more than ever. I didn't really love it before: but now it is my handicapped child, my unhappy history.

My friend Goca is sleeping with her newborn baby every night in a van with potatoes, in a village hit every night: somebody must know why. She is living with her husband, parents and in-laws: she says she cannot move.

Love stories are changing: getting more tolerant on one side and less on another. Unfaithfulness and other vices are permitted, but not distance or lack of solidarity.

May 3rd, 1999

Yes, it happened, a blackout, in a city of two and a half million people. It happened for sixteen hours, at the time I am writing, but I think it happened for good. I think we got the message, we will never have the security of a modern society. Was that the NATO message? Well, we never had security before. We had restrictions, blackouts for days at the time of Tito's full openness to the world. We, political idiots, are praised and punished in the same way: with blackouts. And we react to it as trained dogs. We gathered at the terrace and immediately put out all the items and ideas we had for survival without electricity and water. We people of the terrace were just neighbors who hardly knew each other until the beginning of the war but now we are in the same trench. We collected water in tubs and bottles, the last drops, we writers offered books for fire and others had grain, potatoes...

We decided to go to bed at 8 p.m. with the sun and to organize morning gatherings for survival. We concluded that the worst are the planes, the bombs, the leaflets, the bridges falling down while you are trying to run away or get the food -- Who's responsible for that? We didn't bother to ask it. When will this end, most of them said, we lost all the bets, it should have already ended. I said, June 2nd. Everybody felt relieved.

This morning some parts of the city are getting back light and water. Not me: I am here at my friend's table with my portable computer writing my words as if they were my last. Next to me workers are painting the window and the kids are baking bread. Tomorrow, they said, the phone lines and the last bridges will be destroyed. I want to say good-bye to too many people, so I say good-bye to none. I just say to myself: all this is behind us, tomorrow an afterlife begins...

We buy candles in the church, they last longer and are cheaper, we buy batteries for radios, we buy simple food and plain water, no cigarettes, no alcohol. We fish out old clothes and rearrange the furniture for the practical purpose of life in the dark, in a group. All of Belgrade is doing it, we who are not leaving the city. We are many cities, like in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, a book I translated. I am not unhappy, I am only crying.

May 4th, 1999

My young girlfriend took an overdose of tranquilizers, she said it wasn't on purpose, she just wanted to go to sleep after so many weeks. I believe her: I prefer that solution to fighting with visas, borders...the whole world...

Yesterday on the streets it was a beautiful day, no electricity, no water. But the lost looks in people's eyes, young, old, soldiers, fancy teenaged girls said: what shall I do with my day, with my life, what's next? It's not only the bombs, it's this pointless passing of hours, days which shatters us. Some react vitally to it, doing many bizarre things, mostly physical, but most are depressed and immobile...I guess this is the new war of the new order.

We have problems with the children: small ones cry all the time, big ones are more aggressive, angry, spoiled than ever. They cannot, do not want to, get used to the new war of the new order: they cannot or do not want to understand what goes beyond their power of understanding. It must be our fault too, the parents, this lack of a bridge between

generations: we didn't want to infect them with old wars and now they are living a new one without any continuity.

The worker who came to help me move the furniture asked me for a glass of water. I said, of course. After drinking it he sat down and said, please, be so kind, give me another one... Only then I realized that he comes from a part of the city without water. I said, please, take a bath, whatever, we have water...It is a criminal war. He looked at me and said: but we will win. I didn't realize that there are still people able to consider this life a victory.

Patients from the mental hospitals have been set free, also some convicts. One of them came to my door today: he was desperate, he needed money. I asked him: why were you in prison? He said: I killed my wife and her lover. At least passion motivated his crime: the killings going on these days have less morality...

May 5th, 1999

Last night I went to bed early and I stayed awake in the dark, alone in my bed and in my room. I realized I haven't had a chance to be alone since the bombs began. I felt invisible, like when I was a kid. Then I became a feminist and I wanted to be visible. It is raining, we have no electricity, but no bombs either. No use writing, my words are interrupted by blackouts, I heard on BBC that we didn't have light for six or seven hours... It is not true and I don't know whose propaganda that is, local or foreign. So it doesn't help us Serbian political idiots to believe news about the Albanians, whatever, from either side, since we hear that we have electricity and water only because it is politically correct to somebody. All news is reported to suit someone.

I am running from one flat to another with my portable computer, meatballs, and the laundry, running after electricity. I have a feeling of carrying bad luck. As soon as I arrive the lights go out, the moment I leave to go to another flat that has electricity, the lights come back on... It is as when you queue in one line, and the other one runs faster... You cannot win between the superstition and the feeling that you are a loser anyhow... I run like a Masai tribe member, I heard they never walk or stop except to sleep or die.

May 6th, 1999

I remember something I forgot: the day of Tito's death, May 4th: It never happened before, it was the biggest day of my Big History life before we got bombed. The utmost publicity we have had, on May 4th, 1980, is now overshadowed by May 4th, 1999. The name of my street was Kosovska (the street of Kosovo), just behind the Parliament; in 1980, the cars of all presidents and kings from all over the world were passing under my terrace to reach the Parliament where Tito's body was on display. I stood on the terrace, the first floor, the only one in my building: kings and presidents in open cars were waving to me because my terrace had a flag, being the only terrace, by law. I waved back, I remember, to Jimmy Carter's mother, King Juan of Spain, Brezhnev, Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein, Fidel Castro... Then I took my video camera and decided to make a conceptual movie. I filmed the King live, ten meters away from me and in one sequence got him on TV entering the Parliament and saluting Tito's body. I felt I was the invisible center of the world, me and my camera... Then the police came to my door and took my camera away from me, it looked like a machine gun to them... I heard President Clinton calling Marshall Tito Mr. Tito today on TV. Well, he is wrong, he was no Mister, not even president, he was our Marshall: our soft dictator, father, grandfather, everything. Maybe he gave good autonomy to the Albanians in Kosovo, but he gave us nothing but a void political autonomy. I am not nostalgic, neither I am sure are the Albanians, we all want more. Today is also a holy day for the Gypsies and a saint day for many Serbs. I prefer remembering that, finally free from memories of Tito, thanks to the bombs and heavier fears than living under the soft dictatorship of your holy father.

When I was fourteen I painted a nun: a self-portrait, I realized afterward. Today I think it is a beautiful painting, it is impressive, and it is my only painting. Otherwise I have no talent for understanding paintings or doing them. It was an excess, it was a whim, a miracle, I dare say. Ever since I knew, I have had this urge to become a nun but my interests were so mundane. The only traces of my nun's destiny were my way of dressing; always the same, as in a uniform, modestly, my taste for food (leftovers), my pathological honesty, self-punishment and pleasure in sharing suffering. A few times, when in a life crisis, I took my painting and smashed the frame with the glass by stepping over it. I don't know what it meant. After I saw my cousin the day she died of AIDS, I realized that the painting was her too, not only me. We do look alike... Today my painting looked back at me, it has the gift

of alive suffering eyes and gave me a safe place I need so much and cannot find these days of bombings: to a nunnery, to a nunnery I go.

Everybody I talk to has left, is leaving, has a safe place to go. I don't: I don't have a reserve homeland, a reserve home. I come from nowhere else except from Belgrade, and wherever I've been I haven't left anything behind to go back to. I am desperately from this falling city: me, my family and my friends. We change flats to pass the night fanaticizing which is safer, what will be hit that particular night, as I am sure everybody does. It is a game we play, a game of rats.

A guy I met yesterday fought in all our wars in past 10 years, not because he wanted to, nobody asked him, he was drafted, first as an 18-year-old to Croatia, then to Bosnia, then to Kosovo. Now he came back home and said no. He doesn't consider himself a deserter, he says he cannot take it anymore. He had two kids in the meantime, he saw death too many a time, and he doesn't believe in his superiors anymore. He is a very simple person, an engineer and a husband. Knows too much and too little. But he speaks all the time about war. When he goes back to his life before the war he remembers only the situations when his life was in danger. One of the stories he told me was how his best friend, a woman, fell in love with a guy who responded to her until he was mobilized. She is now crying her guts out saying: isn't love the most important thing in the world, how could he leave me. And the young engineer is explaining her that men are different, that men always respond to army calls even when they have wives and children because...he couldn't explain. But then he added abruptly: I would never do it again.

May 7th, 1999

Today is my parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. We planned a party, a surprise party, but they said yesterday they were sick and could not have any guests today. who knows what it is like to begin and end a marriage with bombings. There is a latent conflict going on between those who left the country and those who stayed behind. Both choices actually were no real choices, a Sofia's choice, whom to sacrifice in war, your daughter or your son? Neither group is feeling good, blaming the other one for it. The emigré Serbs in Budapest, mainly better off women and children and intellectuals from Belgrade are called here 'Vanity Fair'. They scornfully call the rest of us in Belgrade 'patriots'. It was a matter of prestige to go or to stay behind: as a political idiot I didn't understand which was more

prestigious because both sides claimed theirs was. I have to go to Budapest for a few days for work, but I am afraid. I am afraid of the journey, of the borders, of the bombs, falling bridges. But I am also afraid of not doing what I must: when it comes to feeling bad, I belong to both groups.

Belgrade was spared of bombs for three or four nights: we all got progressively worried. We didn't know what was going on. We can hardly plan our day without the night sirens, and after two nights of heavy sleep without bombs I couldn't sleep without them. Now, a few minutes ago, two big explosions were heard in the middle of the day. Good, we are not left out from whatever is going on, we are like other towns and villages.

The second and third largest cities of Yugoslavia have been hit hard: in Nis, the center with the green market is destroyed. Many civilians are dead: NATO knows nothing about it, a Sky news journalist confirms it. Of course it is true. Whatever happened it is real, not only pictures. It reminds me of the incident in the Sarajevo market when people queuing for bread were killed: for year the debate went on, was it Serbs, was it Muslims who fired the shell. I knew a woman who was in the queue. She was the mother of my friend; that was a fact, as nobody can deny that I have relatives in Nis.

May 8th, 1999

My friend's house is opposite to the Hotel Yugoslavia, next to the Chinese embassy: both were hit last night. Her windows fell out, and pieces of the bomb landed in her room. I phoned her immediately after I heard what the target was. She is in the computer business. She asked me: do you know the name for the windows in Belgrade - broken windows, windows with criss-crossed scotch tape? WINDOWS 99... People here are developing a sense of humor to fight back NATO. A graffiti: Clinton, give in, we are completely fucked up... Again without electricity: but as I thought, this time it is much easier. No philosophical despair of the dark, just concrete problems with strategies prepared: to find good candles, tame spoiled children, avoid colds. Clinton said he was keeping his finger on the electricity button of Serbia. I must admit I liked his nonchalant style in the Lewinski affair. But now I see it differently: he is simply rude, more rude than guilty. As my friend put it: I could not say that for the electricity button in my home.

And today is the anniversary of the famous funeral of Tito. Last night I dreamt of Tito,

whom I used to consider my grandfather when I was a kid. And I dreamt of my dead aunt who during the hyperinflation in 1993, being a professor on a pension, could only buy a few dozen apples and bread with her monthly check. Two different life stories divided only by a few years of cosmos time: in my dream, in my virtual reality, I was calling for justice and an explanation.

May 9th, 1999

Today is Sunday, why?

I slept 13 hours because there were no bombs, tonight I am sure many will fall. I feel like a battered woman, expecting violence and feeling loved when the hit misses me. I gave an interview to an Italian TV last night: news on life in Belgrade. Whilst I was talking I realized how terrible our life is and how actually we have become symbols of bad guys leading a bad life. Others can sympathize or condemn us, but the image is clear, we are the bearers of collective guilt. Now I am sure that if it doesn't exist inside us, as it shouldn't, it surely exists outside us, as a wall. Today I am afraid of bombs more than ever because I realized that nobody knows or cares that we are bombed every day with many mistakes after which a sincere sorry follows. My legs are trembling and I dare not stay alone: I begin to hate...Intensively...Foreign languages...Words...Gestures...When you cross the line of reparable damage...A big blast in this moment tells me it is so...

And again, as we sat on the terrace, we political idiots from the same trench, we drank wine, smoked very bad and expensive cigarettes and fantasized about our future. Since we have none, we are free to be all we want in our dreams. I never had such wild ambitions, dreams, joys as these nights on the terrace: I even offered myself to lead this country out of war if my refugee friend from Krajina agrees to be the Minister of Finance and my best friend from the Women's Center, the Minister of Police... But actually, if I survive the bombs getting closer by mistake to my life, which is the true mistake, I will be a fisherwoman on a desert Greek island: I will catch the fish, look it in its eyes and throw it back into the water until I catch a true mermaid who will take me back to my primordial homeland, deep deep down into the sea...

And let me too say something about the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy: of course it is a big gross, incompetent mistake, a normal mistake whether it is a dirty or a

clean war. But so much noise about nothing: what about all the others killed whilst sleeping in their beds, buying food on the green market with their last dime, drinking wine on the terrace looking at the starry sky above. Those people are not Chinese, those people are not refugees, they are not even Serbs anymore as they used to be: the word has been too much used and abused. They are not permitted to be. As Wole Soyinka said: *The Man has Died, is Dead...*

PS Big dilemmas going on here: shall we pay the bills or not? When I feel good I think we should, but when I am down, obviously I think not. No rational or moral arguments come up as they used to, once when we were alive.

May 10th, 1999

A night without alarms, silent and dark; the underground station was full of people, as at the beginning of the war. Yesterday, in the middle of the day an unexploded bomb burst unexpectedly in the center of Belgrade. Nobody was killed, per chance the weather was rainy, it was a lazy Sunday afternoon. I tried to get an Italian visa, to have an exit plan, in case I go crazy and start doing strange things. Yes, that is my fear, that I will lose my nerve and become somebody else: a killer, a cat...a zombie. After days of long and complicated negotiations, with generous help from my Italian friend, the department of visas in the Italian embassy was hit: my papers are lost, as other shattered hopes. Always too late, my usual script; I am going crazy after all. I was driving my car, I haven't done it for over a month now, and I turned on the radio. Some old nostalgic music was playing: 'April in Belgrade', 'Green, green eyes of yours', and all of a sudden I got a fit of sobs. I had to pull over because my eyesight was blurred with tears and I was crying out loud as if in physical pain. I said to myself, you are a reasonable person, you must control yourself and know what is going on in your head. You never liked that music, you never liked to drive a car. Yes, but what I loved was a life I lost forever: and part of it was the luxury of not loving sentimental music or driving a big car. It was a feeling of a terrible loss as if I were killed by accident and somebody else has stepped in my place, in my skin, to live this new life.

I don't know how to write down a personal confession I heard yesterday. It is the worst story I heard since the beginning of the war in Kosovo. Bluntly: a young man, dealing in gold, not a criminal but somebody who has to survive, came across teeth filled with gold.

He crushed the teeth, and then vomited. He said: lately the price of the gold has gone down very much here in Belgrade, there are many Albanian jewels around. I felt a terrible toothache at that moment: nobody nowadays has golden teeth, but I do, I don't know why, an Italian dentist did it when I was 16. I carry that bullet in my head ever since.

May 11th, 1999

A thin young girl of 15 was passing me on the street. She seemed very self-conscious and shy at the same time: the tortures of adolescence. I looked at her longer than I normally would have because I was thinking of my daughter and of myself at that age. At that moment a big explosion shook the ground. In a second she became somebody else, a baby and an old woman. Her gestures changed, from a beautiful urban girl she turned into a frightened animal, she took her hands to her throat, as if somebody was choking her, then to her heart, like a Greek fortuneteller, and then she fainted, turning back to an urban princess, Snow-white... Young girls...

Today our children got their grades, officially no more school, mostly they are pardoned. My daughter's friend went to Australia with her parents some years ago when the situation here began to worsen. Now they have a house on the sea, she has become a model and my daughter, she is fighting for her life. They stopped writing to each other, no common topics: my daughter has grown old very quickly while preserving a childish dimension, I guess forever, like that girl on the street. The Australian girl is the opposite. I could have made the choice of those parents but I didn't: my daughter carries the burden of my family history which is not lighthearted, it is full of deaths and wars, heroes and losses. Nobody is born free, and probably that is why one doesn't die of one's own free will...

A friend of mine, an Austrian, whose father was killed on the Russian front, was eleven when Vienna was bombed. He and the other kids searched the city every day playing war games; during the nights they were mostly in cellars. They found a body of a dead Russian soldier in one corner of a dark street. He told me how every day they would go to see the gradual decay of the body; it was his soldier, he felt, a reparation for his dead father on the Russian front. In Belgrade soldiers, young, fully uniformed and armed reservists, push prams, kiss wildly at the corners with their beautiful girlfriends; until yesterday they were

in schools, universities. Until yesterday their life was invisible and insignificant. Now it is priceless.

May 12th, 1999

I am running through the city like crazy, collecting papers, documents which prove that I am myself, doing this also for members of my family so we can get a visa. In the meantime I hear that the border with Hungary was hit last night, a bridge, that Hungarian customs' officers are searching people with guns and asking for bribes, depending how they feel that day. And of course, if you are a man, to get out of the country you need a special permission. And the alarm, on all the time, night and day, and detonations... Why am I doing this? In order to do something, I guess, to fake normality, which at this point is not possible to invent. I don't even want to leave, I should go here and there, to a Congress, to buy medicines, to see the world, as somebody put it. Because I am a woman, I guess, women in these situations do all these things, and afterwards to a nunnery to a nunnery they go.

I gave a lecture yesterday, Women and War, interrupted by the alarm and two strong detonations. I stopped, saying I cannot go on until I hear where my family is right now. The phone was ringing, everybody in the room had the same problem: young people were harassed by their frantic parents and vice versa. We exchanged information on safety and went on with the lecture. We were so absorbed that we didn't hear when the alarm was over, two hours later... When the war stops it will be the same, we won't notice. I hear on the news that last night were the heaviest bombardments yet in Yugoslavia, and that they will increase. All the news is finally on the same line, national and international, I think even the Chinese channel, on our president's daughter's TV, though I haven't learned Chinese yet. NATO wants to break down the regime; the regime wants to break the New Order and NATO and we people of Kosovo and Serbia are not only hostages but bodyguards of whoever gets us first. Not that I don't have an opinion, a vote, but both sides expect me to break the other physically, with my bare hands and my sheer life.

We just heard that the center of Belgrade will be hit tonight: the Writers Association, opposite to the military target is evacuating, some of my friends too. The Writers Association has been through all these wars notoriously nationalistic, oldfashioned,

patriotic in a ridiculous way. Yet when a bomb hits a cobblestone, I am sorry for both, I don't think anybody deserves to be hit by a bomb to become better...

May 13th, 1999

Besides a lack of cigarettes which has produced interminable queues swirling like snakes round the buildings, corners, parks, wherever they sell them, we now also lack detergent for washing machines. Actually you can find it on the black market, doubled in price, as well as cigarettes. I was wondering last night, how does my diary sound, like an underground diary, like a diary of the Mother of Ann Frank? I am actually leading a dangerous life, that is why my diary is interesting for people who are more aware of the danger than I but used less to it. To me, my life is just a simple, boring life: complicated, dangerous, I don't know or care. I want it to change, as I used to even before the war. My neighbor, a refugee from Knin, a Serb who left with 500,000 other Serbs under Croat bombs with only \$100 in his pocket, said last night as we were listening to the NATO planes above our heads: The third world war, that is what is going to happen and save us, the interest will shift. Anyway it has nothing to do with us, it is the USA, Russia and China who are fighting. His wife looked up at me frightened: I hope the Third World War doesn't happen. She always contradicts him and is right, but he is the one who dares, who has visions, always wrong. I wonder if other men in power, men who are ethnically cleansing, bombing, punishing have nobody like that to contradict them, to stop them. I just heard on Sky news how Serb men fight differently than British and other soldiers. How stupid it sounds, isn't it racism, militarism, sexism? Finally I see the link on my own skin: I know the Serb soldiers, I could be their mother, girlfriend, I fought with them in everyday life as a wife, mother. On the battlefield they would be as good and bad as other men of the world: they watch the same films, with Bruce Willis, drive the same cars, dream of Pamela Anderson. I fight with them and their culture and that is an unfair war; otherwise, they match each other perfectly, all over the world, as friends or foes.

May 14th, 1999

In order to get a visa you have to have a new passport, but you cannot get a passport because the system is down in the police station. Actually, you cannot get a visa anyway because the system is also down in the Italian embassy, but you can go to Budapest, and

maybe, if you can cross the border, if the system is not down there too, and if you have a lot of money for the bribes, for the hotels, for the food, and days and days of waiting, you can get a visa put into a new passport. And feel lucky. Catch 22 and bad luck today. Riding in a cab, which is impossible to find without people inside who will share it with you, I heard the news: again refugees killed, local news says hundreds. Other news: military barracks hit where sons of my friends are on regular military service, the ones I dream of being killed every night. I say, stop the car, I don't know why. The cab driver stops, but the man next to him screams, you cannot do this to me, I am in a hurry. I shake the door handle open, the driver shouts, not that way. And I step out on to a busy street as a big red car nearly kills me. Actually the driver did blow his horn very loudly, but he didn't slow down, and I didn't see him until he nearly killed me. As a driver and as a pedestrian I have noticed that it isn't safe anymore around other drivers. They just do not slow down, they are at war with all the world doing their share of killing. I don't know why I stepped out of the cab to run... I couldn't listen to the news anymore. My head is spinning now and I say, to comfort myself: you had your share of risk for this week. While I was on the street the alarm set off. I started cursing out loud not noticing military uniforms all around me, protecting their bombed building in downtown Belgrade. One of them said, madam don't say fuck, it is the Stop alarm siren. And I noticed that the others had also stopped running, out of panic we don't even distinguish the sirens anymore, we just run.

May 15, 1999

A woman who works as a registrar for marriages in the center of Belgrade, in the biggest municipality, is on TV. There are more marriages in war than in peace: brides in white dresses and soldiers ready to go to the front, she calls them future marriages. Young people come out of shelters, deeply in love and go straight to get married. Also many pregnant women with whoever with them, sometimes only a piece of paper in their hand from their husband to be. And a fact, more children are born in war than in peace and more boys than girls. Again, I don't believe in this world as it is, it seems made for war more than for peace.

A night under alarm but without bombs: let me speak about a new common phenomenon here: sleepwalkers. I would say people are really cool on the streets, too cool for my taste. Only babies scream when the alarm sets off, the only reasonable beings with fear. In the

evenings the city is dark, completely dark. You step into puddles, dog shit, vomit and spit (that last being my obsession) but otherwise, people play loud music and dance near the windows with candles, sit on their doorsteps near the cellar to watch the low planes, exactly 675 flew over last night. They have developed humor, black humor, solidarity, fatalism, love for their kin...yes, a very specific Belgrade that is, at its best, electrifying, dangerous and loving. Not as in 1991, when the war in former Yugoslavia started, when Belgrade was at its worst: nationalistic, primitive, with squares full of dressed up people in ridiculous uniforms, angry with other nations, politicians. I guess Belgrade, like any too big city, is both all the time, depending on what boils up and that is not predictable, history is art not science, this war proves it. But coming back to cool Belgrade: it is so until the dawn. Then, people go home, to their beds, the worst raids being over...Then they dream, they have nightmares, all of them. I have heard so many stories, people tell nothing but their dreams to say how they feel. The dream seems one common dream with personal deadlocks. It is a dream of not recognizing your bed, flat, place, city: of roaming through your own house and shouting for the names of your loved ones who are out of reach. Dreams shouldn't be interpreted, they should be lived, as stories. Sometimes, we living in the same house even meet sleepwalking, speaking, shouting words of loss, but in the morning it is never the same, we can never tell what really happened and where it led us, since we are still here, dreaming again the same dream.

May 16th, 1999

Last night the planes nearly came through our windows, along with the local artillery defense. We have a beautiful old-fashioned typical Belgrade window overlooking the inner courts of the tall old classic buildings. In these courtyards you have a different life: an underground, free space mostly populated by gypsies or just by people who live in the center of Belgrade as though they are in the countryside, shielded by outer walls of modern society. They have wells, small gardens with vegetables, outdoor toilets. Those of us with flats overlooking the courtyards see and hear them but they don't see or hear us. I was born in such a flat in downtown Belgrade, and years later when I saw my present flat I loved it immediately because of its double face which reminded me of my childhood.. But we have a clear view from the inner courtyards on the sky and low planes seem as birds which might enter our windows, whilst the windows facing the city have only big buildings in

front of them. So in order to avoid the war we shift from the windows overlooking the drama of the inner courtyards to the windows facing other windows.

. And my daughter said: This war will never end. I cannot sleep in my room because of the planes. And I said of course it will end: all wars end. But what comes after is no better, I thought, poverty and isolation. The Italian embassy is no longer willing to give us visas, here or in Budapest. Well, that is my punishment for being late and lazy in survival. Italy was a mother country for me, I never thought I would be a foreigner for them. I heard that other people in exile are using bad words for us here. As bad as some here use for those who left.

The name of the newly opened café at the Hungarian border with Yugoslavia is Casablanca whilst the one in my street has changed its name from New York to Baghdad café.

May 17, 1999

A baby of two I know keeps running around the house saying: I won't give up Kosovo. Her father says, I wish this Kosovo crisis would end soon, this baby is impossible, she doesn't want to learn to speak, she watches TV all the time... Air raid: I am on the street, near a police station. We are all running, they jump into a jeep saying Hurry, I hurry: we are living in the same story for a moment. Today in the park armed policemen were going after kids to take their feet off the benches, I was quarreling with them... At the municipality, we were waiting in crowds in the hall for our names to be shouted out: that is how we get our birth certificates nowadays. I realized after 5 minutes that the names shouted out were mostly Muslim names. I even thought one of them was mine and I put my hand and took another Jasmina's document until a much younger pregnant woman snatched it from my hand saying, it is me, it is me, I need it for my baby. I could have been her, but she couldn't be me, that's because I am a Serb and she is a Muslim, in a Serb state. Everybody is talking about a general mobilization expected to happen on May 24th; there is slightly more panic and tension in the air, on the streets. I wonder what is going on in people's heads, probably the same mess I am writing about, more or less articulated. My friend said: there is incredible amount of decent people in this country without any capability to organize themselves, work together, structure a party... A country without opposition, a country without leaders but one, a country of political idiots like me who will eventually die instead of overcoming shyness, ignorance, a wall of privacy.

May 18th, 1999

My heart and mind is with the young soldiers I know in Kosovo: every hour the war goes on I see them more dead: as if they are already dead but their death not yet acknowledged. Half of them were sent to war by their parents, as I would have been had I been male and younger, or if not by their parents then by their lack of life options: The Legion of Foreigners.

Two o'clock a.m.: I walk through Belgrade in complete darkness: nobody is around. I feel blind, I see nothing but I know my street, the holes on the road, the cracked pavement, the low trees and angry dogs behind the gates... I make my way as if in a wood, under alarm, thinking of the young soldiers, sons of my friends who I saw grow up, feeling close to them... I feel guilty. My friend, a university professor, now at home -- no more schools here, only war training -- found her old father, grown senile in the past few weeks on the ledge of their balcony. She pulled him back with strength she didn't know she had. She takes care of him like a big baby, or a big dog. He is not aware anymore that he is a human being or what he might be: he found his way out of this hell.

May 19th, 1999

Our friend in Kosovo, an Albanian, is holding a political/support school on a hill for those who stayed behind. A young boy with built up muscles, a university student, today was robbed in front of his university by a person who said that one day he will be pursued in Hague by the same law students that now he is robbing. They had to give him all their money. Those kind of scenes always happen in big cities, in Belgrade too: the funny thing is that in better times a muscular law student would have struggled before being robbed. Today he knew who is the boss and whose country it is. Many many people I know have left, are leaving, afraid for their lives, literally and metaphorically. God knows to which category I belong, staying here, unable to move. Today we start shooting a film based on my diary; our life has become a circus, said my daughter. No, our life has become a theatre, *la commedia dell'arte*, this form of representation I always loved best...

Walter Benjamin -- my favorite philosopher whose angel with its back turned towards the future has become my angel -- committed suicide at the Franco-Spanish border in 1940, when he was denied entry. Now, modern and postmodern times have come, once people

used to commit suicide when they went bankrupt. Today it is not so anymore. Today even Anna Karenina wouldn't commit suicide but become a feminist, activist, SOS hotline for battered women, or just find a new lover, man or woman, and go to Venice to construct herself a new identity. But still, trafficking in visas which could save our lives here today, as in dealing with violent life affairs, I feel that sometimes I am close to that line of giving up postmodernity and going back to times when people didn't just live at any price...

May 20th, 1999

We were sitting last night and watching a video interview of our Albanian friend where she was telling how she escaped from Pristina, speaking about us too and the solidarity she had with Belgrade and not with her Serb neighbors. Then the missiles started flying above our heads, then the explosions and concussions, many I would say: we went on listening to the horrors of our friend, before crossing the border, afterward in a camp at Blace in a no man's land with 100,000 refugees. It was a perverse situation: solidarity emotions before survival instincts, as if we could do something. Our children got nervous, they said: stop with that stuff. I lost concentration too, too many bombs, I felt I should do something, so I started walking up and down the room like a wild animal trying to find a safe place in case a bomb should fall on our house. We survived, I am here writing, a hospital was hit among others, a chemical factory. Yesterday round my corner, the building of the Democratic Party whose leader is in exile in Montenegro has been surrounded and attacked by group of very white haired loud patriots: they called him a traitor. He is middle-aged and handsome, speaks foreign languages, and has a beautiful wife and two children.

In war with NATO and in a civil war too.

May 21st, 1999

I managed to get a new passport for my daughter and a new identity card, her own for the first time in her young life: Wow, she said, I am a big girl now, I will make you pay for this. Someone will pay for her sudden rise to adulthood, but I won't live that long, I am sure of that... War deserters and their mothers protesting, leaving the army, the battlefields. If I were a mother of a soldier who was sent against his will to fight the war against NATO in place of the white-haired patriots sitting in the center of Belgrade, I would buy a gun and kill those responsible, giving my life in exchange for my child's. Watching my Albanian

friend's interview, I realized how perverse it is, we were crying for her, listening to her life story indifferent to the planes above our heads: we are just a step behind the Albanians. And if we decided to leave, nobody would take us.

I am exhausted, my computer too. The planes are so low, the detonations so frequent; a bomb in my place would be a less serious mistake for NATO than the hospital collateral damage: and locally who would manage to dig us out... We were listening to 'A Whiter Shade of Pale', and I felt the joy of being young, of being alive... Then another close detonation... Wild seventies... But the children scream: stop that stupid music. What does 'whiter shade of pale' actually mean, beyond death? We played with death, now we are living our words of youth. For my children, it won't be so. It will be the opposite. I cannot explain anymore to them my music, my way of life. The famous wind of Belgrade, *Kosava*, is blowing strongly as an enemy, screaming behind our door, banging the window, Stop the wind. I wish everything would just stop for a second and give me a chance.

My market used to be the happiest place in the world, with gypsies, peasants, second-hand shops, smugglers, police running after all of us doing illegal stuff, but not too fast because they did the same things privately. Now, it has become a hard-faced market: we intellectuals don't talk politics anymore, but the people on the market have started to, they take sides: and I heard this morning more than two sides were at stake: NATO, our official president's and Djindjic's, the leader of the democratic party in exile. After many years we finally have more than one option, at least at the market of ideas. And the woman who is selling me eggs said: yes, my love, we have still everything, except happiness, my son is fighting in Kosovo and I haven't heard from him for many days now. She didn't even cry, there was a hard sadness in her face, in her hard talk...

May 22, 1999

We are without electricity again, there is a complete blackout in most of Serbia. I am using my batteries, my last words as in Shakespeare's drama. I always say goodbye but then I am back again to say something else.

We are shooting the diary, the Political Idiot, all over town. We have no problems, reality is the best script and scenery for all the films possible here... Again I am losing my words, I am all in images, going back to my primary language, my primary loss. I am OK with the

world and with myself, had I to die at this moment I would lie in peace... But I want to survive.

May 23rd, 1999

The people on the streets want to be filmed, they want to tell us their opinions, fears: even the policemen from whom we were hiding the cameras. It is a big carnival of anxiety, to phrase their life in their own words: to survive... They hardly believe their own words: some are angry with NATO, some with the whole world, some with local power. But they all see the pointless situation they are in, they just want to survive and tell us about it. Just like me. We fear isolation more than bombs.

A young soldier has come back on leave for three days: The one I dreamt of as dead. My joy is not personal, my joy is universal, for all those who have managed to stay safe and sane. As I talked to him, he sounded more in touch with his mind than I am: otherwise we are on the same wavelength. I am not sure we were so before the war. We are without electricity for more than 24 hours now. Some don't even have water. There is absolutely nothing we can do. We cannot cook, clean, read, use PC, watch TV. Yes, we can talk and phone each other and play cards by the light of candles. But we have never done that before. I just stare in front of me and relax, think. The anxiety goes out of me and I dream and drowse. It is raining heavily, the light is low, it is cold outside: very strange weather for this time of the year. It probably has to do more with NATO weapons than with God as some superstitious people claim. We are all becoming superstitious the more we are isolated, like tribal people. We go to bed and get out of bed, who cares about the hour of the day. We sleep a lot and I wonder if we should take a pill and oversleep this void. I phone my parents, they tell me, don't worry the Russians will give us electricity. They always manage to calm me with fairy tales just as when I was a kid. Truth doesn't help in these situations of Superior Will and Command. A lots of emails and phone calls from unknown people who read me and want to share my pain. I am astonished.

May 24th, 1999

Mostly without electricity and water; all our efforts are to fill in that gap. Every day I say I must learn how to bake bread and then I read and write instead: old bad habits I must get rid of. However, today is easier than yesterday, many books have been written in many

wars about no water, no electricity, I remember some Russian poets, for example... What is specific to Belgrade in 1999 is that we are slowly getting angry with ourselves for being political idiots. My taxi driver, a middle-aged engineer who lost his job, said: we deserve it. We applaud the loss of electricity, not when it comes back, because we know it is not for good. This morning I said to the children, who didn't want to get out of bed because there was nothing to do: we should all repair electricity during day and NATO will hit it again by night. That's the game: it is not important who wins, the point is to play...

And water? Well, that's a more serious matter. My friend who has been taking care of her old disabled and dying father, the one who wanted to jump over balcony said: I would prefer to die with him than take care of him without water. Whilst my friend from the USA saw smugglers in Hungary with thousands of disposable diapers heading towards Serbia. How can you defeat NATO with Pampers, she asked me? The point is that we in big cities without electricity and water will all need Pampers soon, not only the babies.

May 25, 1999

I thought I was out of my Africa, out of my dark continent of thoughts, hopes, fears and out in the limelight of the ongoing movie, the *commedia dell'arte* or circus that my life has become. I was feeling superficial, young, as I used to be 20 years ago when I was a filmmaker... But then it happened: whilst we were trying to shoot the museum of Tito, in occasion of the official date for his birthday celebration, the Holiday of Youth, as it used to be in his times, deep deep shame took me over. I realized it was noon, the alarm was on, I didn't know the whereabouts of my daughter, my husband was coming back from abroad, somewhere on the borders. During the night, the center of Belgrade had been hit again only 100 meters from the point we were standing. The soldiers who prevented us from filming the museum were hiding under the open sky all over Belgrade, running for their lives, hoping that the bombs go astray because they were the military targets. They were people like me, like my children, whilst I wanted to make a nice shoot: a legitimate request, which I would refuse too, in their place, as I refused as feminist many men who seemed curious onlookers of women's tragedies... My life will not become a circus: my choice to make this film with my friends is to remember and make others remember the things that we will first forget, when we get the chance. It is a memorial of fear we are building in our film, and we are putting in our own lives and bodies for its sake.

May 26th, 1999

Our tedious daily life is becoming important, day by day as we film it. It is the life of everybody I realize, not only mine, and each person who enters in some way or other makes the general picture more convincing, cuttngly clear, and individually we all sharpen our perceptions through speaking out about lack of water, electricity, nightmares, daydreams, no future only a tedious past... Today while we shot we entered a very dangerous zone near Belgrade, a quarter which is hit on a regular basis. The alarm was on and a military car pulled up next to us. Before we managed to show them our permits they pointed their guns: I literally wanted to faint. I must be crazy to be doing this. But then they were very polite and my colleagues explained to me that they were just doing their duty. Finally they warned us to go away: and again I said, why on earth am I doing this. But then, why is all this happening, this madness: how can we stay rational if everybody has gone crazy? It is the politics of high risk, as my husband put it, which has deteriorated into politics of absolute risk.

Then we went to a restaurant on a boat on the Danube: a beautiful place where we used to spend all our money for a few hours of eternity...The food is still good but without sea elements: yes we lost the sea. There is hardly anybody in the restaurant, and it closes at 7 p.m. The fact that we are not permitted to have those few hours of oblivion makes us unable to regenerate, to be good people... Going back home across the bridge, we saw a very few people gathering in the action DEFENDING BRIDGES WITH OUR BODIES. The conceptual artist Marina Abramovic did this in her performances but it was her body she offered, not somebody else's...

I met my Italian friend today: she came back to Belgrade for some time, she has spent many years here. She was telling me how Italy has been awakening since the fishermen in Venice have been wounded. I said Italy is my country too, la mia Italia, and what I cannot support about it at this moment is that one Italian life is worth 1000 Albanian lives and maybe 100 Serb ones: that is the price of awakening. I heard that doctors are advising pregnant women in early months to have abortions. I don't know why, is it radiation, or politico-economical advice? One doctor said: it is just what I would say to my daughter. I also heard on BBC that 1000 babies were born in refugee camps in Macedonia. Life goes on, thank God for that.

May 27th, 1999

Very heavy raids last night: I was so frightened that I had all these philosophical thoughts on my mind, in my dreams. The phone was ringing all night, we were checking what was the target, are we all OK, friends and family. At a certain point I realized I was sleeping between the phone calls unaware of the bombs, sleeping through the bombs but not the phone calls. The place where we shot yesterday was hit by 25 missiles last night only a few hours after we left it. We are just like those idiot journalists who run from one side of the world to another smelling death and danger: I always despised those kind of lives as barren and aggressive. Now my life has lost its inner sense and aura too.

May 28th, 1999

Again no light, a little bit of water, but good weather, sunny and a full moon: our president has been indicted for war crimes, but the American officials said they will still deal with him: we are sandwiched between, we political idiots, common people without light, bread and water. The conflict is deepening, the war is becoming more cruel, and we have to win or to change the world, we few unwanted heroes...

May 29th, 1999

We shot in the Zoo: jailed, hungry, nervous animals. They sense danger before we do, stronger than we do. Especially the *Paunovi*.² As a consequence, mothers eat their young: wolves, tigers and a few others I cannot remember now. The lion is eating his own paws. The eggs of the rare species have decayed... Now, I never liked the Zoo, I cannot even say I like animals because they remind me of my animal side, I want to transcend it, and I did. All of us human beings have: our animal side is a joke, a choice, a sense of natural life. But if we go on around the city easily, with bombs above our heads, without fear, then we have lost our natural, animal side completely. And it struck me: my friend said we will lose all our films, because there is no electricity, we are losing our books, unwritten, unpublished, scattered all around our damaged flats and garages in the city. So we lost also our intellectual, historical side. What is left: a robot, a body, a shell of what men used to be, without an animal or intellectual side to it.

² Peacocks.

May 30th, 1999

Another nervous day full of heat and alarms. I was asked by the Index on Censorship to comment on freedom of speech and the abolition of official state TV from satellite program. The official daily *Politika* is naming some intellectuals as traitors because they are opposition. Why do things always happen in pairs, on binary tracks? I know there are no good or bad guys, but why do I have to always get proof of it whenever I try to make a choice? Maybe the position of political idiot isn't that bad after all, it prevents you from stuffing yourself with all those false problems which you cannot resolve but only live through and pay the consequences. I hear about terrible things going on in Kosovo, from people going there or being there and coming out. They all tell me, this is not war and I must admit that whatever this is I have had enough. My feminist friend wants to organize a peaceful women's demonstration in Belgrade after she finishes painting her doors. I am supporting her, I wonder if they would be successful, but maybe we shouldn't wonder, we should just do it like painting doors and windows. People around me, simple families, are speaking about leaving again; those who left immediately are coming back, because they spent their money or because their visas expired. I know only that I cannot stand bombs and winter together: one must stop.

May 31st, 1999

I remember love, I cannot feel it anymore; I can taste only strong tastes, pepper, anger, fear. The pregnant low sun: yellow as a full moon. Good-looking women furtively looking over their shoulders, the police cars passing by and angrily pointing a finger at them. My market. You would think they were prostitutes but they are cigarette smugglers. They behave as Anna Kareninas who didn't commit suicide but started to live anew.

Dusk: there is something sick in the hot air, as in Durrell's Alexandria, as in love affairs, troubled. Varvarin, one of the towns hit today with big collateral damage, a market place: the translated name is Barbarian. During the second World War a train was hit there with, of course, many civilian deaths. It was natural in those years. But what is even more natural to me is that last night, by chance I met a woman who was in that train, who lost her brother in the attack on the market place in Sarajevo and who knows my mother. I insist, I am not superstitious, at least I don't want to be. Tonight I have electricity, water, like anybody my words will ever reach. What troubles me is the coincidence: we who have

big life troubles meet somewhere sometime. The others fall out of the story. And that is what love stories are all about: a class-structured postmodern discourse. If you haven't been there, you will never reach me, be it underground or in the skies...

My friend who is taking care of her dying father is optimistic today. She says, he is like a baby, completely dependent on me. I do all the work, dirty work, but I feel fine, after all these years finally I am in charge: I have defeated him, I am surviving him. Rumors of protest in the parliament against the war. Yes, even though we are destroyed morally and physically, we political idiots feel always in charge when the power is atomized. All Belgrade is talking about flyers announcing the bridge targets: stay away from bridges. We learned that while crossing the deserted bridge. Belgrade is targeted now day and night: it is hard to restrain young people, to explain to them that we are another phase further, that life is even cheaper, that the war has no end in view, that it is we again who have to bend. They despise and disobey us. I am in panic, I am losing my ground between fear and the need to stay calm.

June 1st, 1999

The bridges weren't hit after all, but I wish they were, so we would be done with it . We were shooting on the bridge, together with CNN, when it was evacuated. Today I will try to get my visa so that when the bridges are down, I will maybe have my papers all in order: I guess that is also the game, the emigration policy. Yesterday my neighbor from Krajina was telling us how he slept in a grave during the bombings, the safest place he could think of being a soldier. His wife said: well, now that I know it you won't sleep in bed with me anymore. Every day the situation is worse but we are better. And day by day it is becoming a moral issue, more than a material one: people are building houses, renovating flats, trying to stay clean and being polite to each other...

June 2nd, 1999

More than a month ago when we were betting on the date of the end of the war, I said, June the second, without any particular reason. Today is the day. Last night we got light after 24 hours, after midnight: eagerly we were listening to Radio Free Europe, in the dark, by the light of candles. When the light came, we didn't turn to CNN, because foreign broadcasts don't speak anymore about us.

But, I had a feeling that maybe this is the day. Anyway, for the first time since the war began, I turned from a political idiot into a reasoning person, if not a witch, and I saw a reason for its ending.

Some people on the radio were expressing the same feeling: the feelings of political idiots but finally put together in political and theoretical language, as all these months everybody from abroad wanted me to speak. I was proud of them, but suddenly I felt also frightened: they will come back, the winners, whoever they may be, those who were away during the horrors in Belgrade and they will take over with their smart language we admire. And again, we will be fooled by them, same guys or new guys, good guys or bad guys. It is all the same, the language is the problem, the language we political idiots cannot control but only submit to. Yes, I am longing for peace but afraid of it: tenderly, as in a big love affair interrupted by separation. I don't know if I will be able to manage it, all that peace, I am worn out with war and happy with it, in order to survive. My Italian friend said, you don't have bread, light, water, but you sound in good shape. I am, I said, and I cannot remember myself some weeks ago when I was unhappy about it. Most people definitely turn their backs on people in trouble, but some don't: this horror is worth only meeting those few and seeing what humanity is made of. I lost most of my friends and relatives but met a few I will never doubt of. We are getting so bored that we can hardly tolerate each other: nothing to do. Children are fighting us, for not letting them go out under bombs, for having nothing to do when the dark falls. I say let's talk, we have forgotten how to tell tales to each other, amuse each other as in past centuries. But for them, sitting in the dark with their parents sounds like complete defeat. And they cry or sulk, depending on their age. My father went to the bank to pay his regular bills of electricity and water which nobody is paying nowadays. He said, we must help the state in this catastrophe. The bank clerk was angry with him. She said: you foolish old man, keeping me here under alarm so you can spend your last dime. Can't you change? See what your stupid obedience brought to us all. My father was strongly offended, as he is past the years when he was treated without due respect being an old retired general manager once in power. But he said to me: I understand her even though she is not right, a state is a state, my father served the Austro-Hungarian state...

June 3rd, 1999

Peace round the corner: I am sick, literally, in bed with a nervous breakdown. I have a fever, I refuse food. We finished the shooting of the war film, we will add the peace epilogue if it comes soon, or whenever. Heat in Belgrade, water and electricity restrictions and many alarms during the day, as well as the usual night raids. Planes all over the sky, flying low above our heads: pressure policy. I am reading Proust: I always come back to him when everything else fails. His books are like medicine, they have an answer for all human deeds and feelings. And thus they tranquilize. I am crying, I am crying so much that I cannot leave my bed. Everything gives me a reason to cry: the war we suffered, the peace we will suffer, too.

June 4th, 1999

Belgrade wasn't under alarm last night: but we still heard and saw the planes. Maybe because we changed the side now with the parliament signing the treaty, and we consider NATO our planes? Big deal anyway, we slept and overslept the stop alarm time. We overslept the market time, the black market time, the visa queue time... I heard the Serbs will have to clean the minefields they created in Kosovo: I guess it will be our children who will clean them, as punished soldiers, not the paramilitary groups which planted them. I also heard on BBC that Serbs will have to pay for the bombings: not like the Jews for the gas applied in gas chambers but still a ridiculous parallel can be made. I thought immediately of our humanitarian aid being reduced to half in order to pay for the expensive AWACS which every night kept us company, which we followed with terror and admiration. Well, the price of integrating into Europe is slavery, I guess, for a non-democratic country as they call us. For a fascistic country as they call us, with the difference that Hitler was defeated by bombs and our president won. Another ridiculous parallel, but what can sound true, after having bombed democracy into a country where fascism is winning.

June 5th, 1999

A storm last night instead of bombs, thunder, heavy oily drops of rain, but so many planes, alarms off and on, incessantly, like clocks out of order... No euphoria on the streets or squares: people believe in peace, in defeat, in some kind of future, but they are not happy about anything, only exhausted, bewildered, disappointed. Whilst the storm was raging I walked down the streets of Belgrade: windows were fully lit, like a great privilege, and

loud music was playing as if the times of darkness and silence were over. But only behind the walls of intimacy: on the streets people still talk only in small voices and to their closest friends. If they have any opinions they are afraid of them. It is not clear who is the winner, but it is clear that we are the losers, we knew it beforehand, so let's get it over with. The scout leader who was supposed to take our children to Jerusalem gave us 75% of the money back: he kept the rest as a war damage for the criminal aggression on our country. I kept quiet: I don't know yet who is the winner, but I am the loser. My daughter got her school grades, the best: after not going to school. I wonder, what would her grades have been if she went to school. She is happy and 5 years older since the bombings started. She became older than me and treats me so: I lost her.

June 6th, 1999

Today I went with my friend to the studio where we kept our books, paper for printing, paintings, personal belongings. It is a studio of a painter friend now living in Croatia. The last time we were there was during the bombings, it was a dangerous moment to cross the bridge but we had to print Hannah Arendt and we needed the paper. But today we couldn't unlock the bolt. It is a windy, nervous day, the corridor is without light and people are clumsy. But no, somebody legally broke into the studio, stored our things away and started his life there: New Power, new rules, new owners. A change occurred and we didn't notice. We will have to fight to get our things back and maybe even pay for them. And we can sue them of course, the new power... After a moment of shock, I calmed down completely, even too much. My fear was that after a trip to anywhere we may meet the same situation in our flats. But things are not important, at least I learned that in these past months, and as my grandmother used to say, every war brings you a winner who takes away everything from you, be it good guys, be it bad guys. Big tension in the air, on people's faces, many car accidents and quarrels; during the bombings it was the opposite. We have to endure now a collective nervous breakdown, fits of rage and tears, punishment and self-punishment. It has already started in families and social groups. Nothing to hold on to, I feel seasick, as if walking on water...

A friend of mine phoned me last night from somewhere in Kosovo, he is a soldier. He knew nothing of the deal in Macedonia, nor did anybody in his regiment, they were in

trenches. He said, we all wish NATO wins soon so we can go back home. But it is all over, I said. He made me repeat several time what happened.

We are waiting for news, I wake up very early in the morning to watch the news, as when the Dayton treaty was dealt... But now it is like when Vukovar was happening, too many places, dates, times, nearly all my mature life, all of my daughter's life.

My stepson said, it wasn't so bad after all, only I wish we never go back to what was before, and that I am sure won't happen, so maybe it was worthwhile.

Young people are stronger and smarter than me and not at all political idiots. I would give them all the power in the world, as long as they are not older than thirty nor had ruled before. But I must admit, today a trickle of life and hope has run through my veins. I felt alive, slightly, but without doubts, as when the first symptoms of love tickle your body and mind.

June 7th, 1999

I spent the night listening to the news: bad news. The local TV was saying that since 11 p.m., peace talks had adjourned. It was more than a lie, it was treason, to my mind. Abruptly we heard the alarm, in the middle of the night, and then of course the planes, the truth, bombing intensified. People were indifferent and depressed hearing the latest news of peace, and now, they are just the same. Because maybe, after all they are not political idiots, but political victims. They know very well that it will be the same, whatever their emotions. They know their leaders and their world too well to hope for an easy, painless solution. But then this morning, my old war adrenaline came back after nightmares of atomic bombs, quick executions, looting and rape, and I know I must go on and cope with whatever is the destiny of us hostages here: be it life or death. I don't want to be pathetic and ridiculous. That's all. I am no witch, I predicted peace June 2nd, I am a false Cassandra, as all modern women are. I feel better, all that abstract peace on my shoulders without concrete displays of it. I would say that all people, Serbs and Albanians were true Cassandra, those who knew better without knowing anything. My translator into Spanish asked me to end the diary because peace has come. Maybe I should give it a try, for the sake of peace.

June 8th, 1999

WAITING FOR PEACE

The more I think, the more all of this reminds me of Greek tragedies and mythology: fathers killing sons, incest, fratricide, in the Big Game of Lies and Death of Our Fathers. Writing in English and Italian, shooting for a German TV: actually I am a true writer in exile. But not having moved a meter from home, even under air raids, gives me the illusion that it is not so. Last night, again raids: low planes, bombs, fear, anger. Well, it is not as it used to be. Now we have peace problems too: fear of the so-called peace which here will never be peaceful. We sat on the terrace and dealt with peace consequences: setting aside the planes and news of a deal or not. We probably won't have money, jobs, schools and democracy, no free space whatsoever. My father said: Don't worry, we will build everything anew, democracy will come slowly, so don't go but help me with my old age. I don't believe him anymore, I know what is it he needs me for, as all these years, to keep me down, to serve his wars and ideas. That is my victory, his defeat and my courage to say no, to drink, to smoke in front of him, and not to die for him.

June 9th, 1999

Ever since March 17th, 1998 I've been writing this painful diary: in a way it was the worst year of my life. I could drop dead now and be sure I've had all of what humankind and books are about: life, death, love, war, common places becoming history. Looking in the mirror I am the same, not even much older, a year or more doesn't make a difference in a middle-aged person. Looking around me however I notice a big difference: this is not my life anymore, my country, my friends, my relatives. As in Proust's *Le Temps Retrouvee*, the magic has gone, no more shields, no more veils. All the way back to the birth of loves, friendships, mistakes, happiness. It is not bad as it sounds, it is just painful and hard to grow centuries in one year under external and internal pressure. I made it, like most of the people around me. We all made it, holding hands or weapons, except for some who didn't, whose names we don't yet know. I don't think I am a political idiot anymore: I am happy I was one but I am aware that, like childhood bliss, I won't be able to hide myself behind that mask any longer and lead a 'normal' life. I realized all the lies, counted all the fakes, and the dimes and lives that have been stolen in the past few years by those who stole this

country from Serbian people. It can all be put in numbers and facts. Why on earth haven't we seen it before? Blinded by our daily passions and the need to stay cozy in despair... Well, now the turn has come, my people will do something I am sure, with or without me, and I am also sure that these gloomy, gray faces walking around my ghost town Belgrade are my people. I belong. But I want to go to Portugal and continue the life of the anonymous nun from the 17th century who wrote endless, beautiful love letters which many centuries later still make people wonder about the sense and miracle of life...

June 10th, 1999

This is now something new: a third phase of this war. After an invisible war we had an aggressive war and now I guess it will be an everyday war. I went to my market to buy everything from cherries and salad to a bottle of whiskey: to celebrate the night I spent in full sleep. I didn't notice the police, the smugglers jumping and fleeing across their tables: big panic and turmoil. Somebody said: it is the inspection, you crazy woman, how can you ask me such stupid questions... I turned to a policeman, I said, leave these people alone, (again the political idiot speaking), they gave us food all these terrible days... He said very tolerantly, yes, but now we have peace, off you go before you get arrested too for buying smuggled goods. What is this, peace, legal state, democracy, my new normality? Off I got to a high school where my daughter is supposed to bring her papers. Parents are despairing, they all want the same few high schools, and there is a limited number, no qualification tests this year because of the war...what is the criterion now? Nobody is interested in defeated states, said somebody from USA, but go on writing. This is not a defeated state, I notice, my mother congratulated me last night when peace treaty was signed with these words: I am happy that you met peace in your own country. I thought, why am I with her and not with my friends and children at this important minute of our lives. It was pure chance I was at her place, but then I realized that in my home we wouldn't congratulate. The people who believe they are defeated think that NATO troops will occupy Belgrade, and are desperate to protect their homes.

They say: we don't speak English. Those who celebrate victory recall very much those who celebrated again last night the sports victory over Croatia. They need to feel they are the best. We stopped crying and being depressed: we are coping with peace and with victory or

defeat. Again both sides in war speak of victory, ignoring the other completely. Again I am denied a part in victory or defeat. But I am an ex-political idiot now with a big future.

June 12th, 1999

War is slowly dropping out of our daily lives: last night the bars and restaurants in my neighborhood reopened and the streets were full of people doing all sorts of things very different than during the air raids when they also were on the streets. The tension has gone, more lights are on and shops again sell Coca-Cola, 24 hours a day. Today, troops are entering my country: people don't feel occupied, but are uneasy, as during the first days of bombings. Nobody really knows what it means for our future, if it is one we can cope with, or influence. Big powers fighting over our mined wasteland, holy land, big crimes, big words, devastation... The only way to stay calm is to take it as it is, without veils, but with all the strength and knowledge which comes from history.

June 14th, 1999

I've been going through my diary for the first time since the war started: so many words, visions...Is that all that is left of my terror, pain? A woman in the market said today: we shouldn't have signed this peace, we should have fought until the very end, until death...They will kill us anyway. Well, I don't agree of course, but people like me have become people like her. I am still holding on to myself before becoming her. Even though I know that she is talking pure nonsense and that my death will not help anybody, now I have a feeling that it may help my life at least.

June 18, 1999

I am moved, I am deeply moved: all those war crimes, all those deeds and words. And nobody on foreign TV says Serbian police, but Serbs. We are Serbs too, but we didn't do it. We have no place to deny it, no other identity to stick too. Free us from the crime, the criminals but without taking our skin off, we cannot survive that . Refugees all over Kosovo, soldiers, reporters... coming in, going out. I don't watch TV anymore: we are still under martial law here, now definitely cut off from those who should be taken care of: as the worst people in the world. I feel ashamed for what has happened to us. I don't want to write about it anymore: I can only repeat, we are decent people here and we are no more

the same or different among ourselves than any other ethnic community. Serbs are not natural born killers.

June 20th, 1999

The first day of summer today, tonight. It should be the first day of peace, NATO has called off the bombings, but it isn't. Here reigns a silence of expectations and fear. What next? Why is the martial law still on? Who are we in war with? Who is the winner, who is the traitor? I guess people always think that it is their neighbor who voted for the government in power, so even if they do not approve of it, it can be considered as legitimate. However, what we are finding out these days is that our neighbor hasn't voted for those in power as we had thought. We hadn't, they haven't, so whose power is it. Nobody's, nobody installed it, so nobody can depose it. People in power at this point desperately hang to it: at all costs. Their desperation is obvious, their cruelty to us and to our neighbors who we had supposed voted for them. Will the change in power cost us more wars? Will all those who were after us all these months because we were bad and bombed us now forget us because we are bad and cut off...

People, like me, are trying not to deal with these matters with which they cannot cope. So we decided to cancel all our peace plans: our power is unpredictable, our martial law seems eternal, our disobedience just a grain in the sand...

June 23rd, 1999

Out of Serbia, out of war, in Budapest. Meanwhile my country is still officially in war. I left my war behind, as if it was somebody else's war. Exactly three months after it all started. As if it never happened. Life was pretending it never happened. As I got onto the bus, my stomach became as tight as a fist. The road rolled in front of me, nothing was really going on but my anxiety was growing rapidly. The roads were clear, the customs officers polite and not overly concentrated, the Hungarians slow and methodical as usual. What really distressed me was that everything was as usual, as if nothing has happened only a few kilometers below, and then another few hundred south even worse. I guess the pain-measuring machine has nothing to do with kilometers, it has its own batteries, its own measures. And then I felt free, suddenly I too thought it had never happened. I looked at my daughter, she too had forgotten about her school worries, about her friends, and was

looking forward to Budapest, where we used to eat McDonald's and shop at Chinese markets... I recovered my language, my gestures of Jasmina that once used to be. Like a robot, I started moving and talking like a woman who is not in war. But all the time something was wrong, I knew it: my heart has changed, I was too emotional approaching the waitress, too sentimental speaking to the cab driver, too distracted with the hotel concierge... I have only been away a few hours from my country at war, from my friends and relatives hysterically waiting for the news, from my anonymous countrymen fighting for everyday survival, thinking of nothing. And I have a feeling that I am ready to forget: given the occasion I could do it. I probably should, I must do it, for my sake, for the sake of my children. But I know I won't: I won't let myself forget even one second of the dungeon I went through.

Now that I am out that will be my reward. Enough. Some may never make it as I did.

June 27, 1999

Back to Serbia: back to a sick child. It may recover: I heard in Budapest that people out there were in the streets, everywhere in the country, villages, towns: soldiers, citizens. I heard also that police were in the street. I didn't understand on which side. I heard that the martial law was abolished but there are no signs of that in everyday life, only people crushing all the laws, breaking all the military rules. Well, I couldn't stand to be away... Not to be in Budapest where everybody spoke a language I couldn't understand and no other. Where everybody gave even less damn for me than my enemies in Belgrade, where nobody really knew my pain, only my books, films, where everybody was speaking about my success and I was crying all the time: crying when alone, crying in company feeling really miserable and isolated from those I shared my pain with for the past years. Well, I passed the border with Yugoslav customs officer telling us to roll on because here the borders are being changed every day, just like the laws. In the Hungarian embassy, at the consulate, the clerk said a similar thing: we have no rules to obey anymore, we just send all the papers to Belgrade and they do whatever they want without any explanation. So don't ask me for any... With innocent eyes, after three days of normal life, I see my city as if after a nuclear catastrophe: the eyes of people are sad and relieved, their movements are as if made for the first time, tentative, frightened... Those who speak sound half-crazy, high-pitched and ridiculous. Hardly anybody has an opinion, a plan. The only thing they repeat

to each other, to those who are coming back home nowadays, after a forced, more or less happy exile, is: good to be back, good to see you...

July 1st, 1999

It is difficult to say goodbye to my diary, it is difficult to leave all these words behind which saved my mind, which were the only world I could rely upon when my real world was falling apart. My real world is somewhat more stable or normal at this point, who knows, maybe the next war is round the corner, maybe private matters of life and death will hurt even more. But that will be another story, as with painful nostalgia my stomach tells me, it will be somebody else's story even if that somebody else should be me. My Jasmina, the one I used to cherish and love, she was killed in this war. Thank God, she was the only casualty in her family, the children are well, heading towards a future only they know, but they feel they have it, they are alive. A potential American agent refused my diary saying that it was not suitable for mainstream publishers, and worried that it didn't have concrete instructions for survival during war for her children; what to take to the shelters, how to deal with irrational fear, sickness, death... Another potential agent from Britain said she loved my diary but unfortunately the British were fed up with the Balkans. In the meantime this diary has been running in about fifty internet websites all over the world, published in papers, magazines: it has been translated in at least 6 languages (that I know of) and I have had numerous letters of support, of offers for moral and material help. This diary of my own, this war of my own is still looking for its safe place, for its form. In some languages it will become a book of its own, and have a life of its own, out of my control or even understanding. In some ways this diary has destroyed my literary ambitions and crafts. As someone put it on a website: I became an anonymous woman writing from Belgrade who became as famous as the Portuguese nun from 16th century and her love letters. Let it all be, this world has shown itself to me not only through my war but through the life of my diary. And everybody is right, it is not a useful diary for survival, and the world is saturated with the Balkans and the readers are really as invisible as the writers... Visible writers write for visible readers, people with views, claims, power and money, and they make the world go round. Whilst, we others, invisible readers and writers have our invisible space just as all those victims of wars who never made it to run the world, but were run down by the world and for whom ultimately I wrote my own 'useless', sentimental, politically incorrect war diary.

July 3rd, 99

Every new day of peace brings us closer to war consequences. Of course it is better without bombs, no doubt of that, but we never knew how much was destroyed and we don't know what will ever be repaired. How many roads, bridges... Greece, the only foreign seaside country we could reach in the past years with easy visas and little money, is now cut off by hours and hours of uncertain driving: highways with craters, minefields, fallen bridges... People are immobile: they dare not speak of holidays, even those who could make it, who are very few. We hear stories of our coast in Montenegro being polluted by the war ships; the big lake in Vojvodina has two unexploded mines: the festivals and summer schools held in nearby hotels are being cancelled. My parents are postponing their trip to the mountain to their small house: no shops are open there, no people are coming, not even those local peasants who used to live there before the war. That mountain was bombed heavily because of the air base that once used to be there: old NATO maps. It has also suffered several very strong earthquakes.

Yesterday, in the middle of the night, our windows started to rattle, our walls to crack. I jumped out of my bed and ran through my flat; I thought, the bombings are not over, I started to tremble, but I knew what to do. But then when I realized it was a strong earthquake I was completely lost, I didn't know what to do. Back during the earthquake on September 30th, 1998, when we were waiting for NATO bombs, we all went in the streets terrorized with bombs and not knowing what to do. When we realized it was earthquake, we knew what to do. On April 30th, 1999, a night that downtown Belgrade was heavily bombed, strong earthquakes followed, completely confusing us: what to do. The moral of my life-story, the political idiot from the Balkan wars: I am more afraid of earthquakes than of bombs, but in either case I don't know what to do.

Oh, one very last detail: after heavy bombings, strong earthquakes and heavy rain, beautiful mushrooms sprang through the cracks in the wall in my flat on the second floor in downtown Belgrade...

“Matrimony” is a diary/essay (Nov.99-Nov.2000) following the death of my mother. She died as a late victim of sanctions and bombings and as a committed communist until the very end. Her disappearance from my life coincides with the gradual fall of the Milosevic regime and communism in Serbia, the ideology of her life ...

Jasmina Tesanovic

MATRIMONY

Editing and photos by **Stephanie Damoff**

For my mother, who turned into a fly...

Patrimony means inheritance, Matrimony means marriage: when my father dies he will leave me a Patrimony, whatever it is, a house, or a sack of shit. Patrimony in a patriarchal society means money, inheritance. When my mother dies, she will leave me Matrimony: in a patriarchal society, it means marriage. The second meaning of the word is a game played with cards.

My mother is dying, eventually will die, maybe tonight, maybe in a year or two: every day I am coming out of the hospital crying, thinking of how she took care of me, of my little baby body, of how now I am taking care of her little old body, crying and vomiting because of deep emotions, because of her beautiful skull that I finally recognize as mine.

Because of realizing how similar and unique we are and how by losing her I will be alone. I never realized before that I wasn't alone.

My mother will leave me alone with Matrimony. That loneliness, that fear of crossing the road without holding her hand nearly got me killed by a tram outside the hospital. And without her around, I guess nobody cares for my mere life. Everybody else who loves me loves something about me, not simply me and my sheer life as she loves me, and how I love her. We don't get along, we never did, we never will get along... Oh, I only wish that the good old feeling of conflict would prevail. But no, the terrible deep fear of letting go of her hand early in the morning when she goes to work (I am three) is stronger. I don't want to let go of her hand, I don't want to be left alone, everybody else is somebody else's mother, she, that small, decaying body, thin face, useless legs and crooked fingers gave me life and now, is leaving me alone. Will I be stronger, will I be happier, will I fall in love? Will I be a better mother, will I have more children? Some say it happens. But this is happening too, without a word. Walking down the road, trying not to be killed by careless strangers and trams, I thought, now it is happening to me. Whatever it is, I am in the midst of it. I must be strong, I must be brave, nobody among my friends has a mother anymore, I am a big girl now, I must be strong for my family...But instead I started crying and looking for a pharmacy to buy some pills. I never took pills before and I am afraid that they may change me, take away my obsession and love for my mother and her bare life. I am looking at the faces of the passers-by. Do they know something?? Can they take care of me? Are they hiding something from me? A mother is bringing a small son hit by a tram to the hospital, she is crying silently but she is running through the corridors as if she had wheels on her feet. Blood is dripping and I am following the trail, that leads to death, I guess.

We enter the trauma department, I seek her eyes, I want to be that passer-by who will help her, but she is not looking at me, she doesn't want to exchange pain or information. She has better things to do. She knows something I have yet to learn: how to mourn. I never attended funerals, hospitals or religious rituals before. I don't know how to socialize on matters of life and death. I always hated to socialize except to have fun and laugh and talk and drink wine. Maybe, that is exactly what I should do here in the hospital.

My mother asks me for a beer, the nurse says, are you crazy, but that is exactly what we both are, going crazy: we want to drink beer and socialize over her death. If it comes, we will take it more easily, if it misses her again, beer won't make it worse.

She says one of her stock sayings: take care of your baby, children never stand still. I know what she means, I never stay still, but I never really moved. I was always tied by her double talk and double messages. Basically: don't go. I never left but I was never there. She made this mess of me.

My psychoanalyst said: your mother was a cold mother and she passed on to you her load of mystery and pain. I yelled, not my mother. No mother can ever be cold because children don't know what cold means, they know only of a mother, and the mother is all. And the load, well, of course, maybe that is what Matrimony is all about: a game of cards predicting turns of life and death. My treasure.

She wants to take me with her, to the other side, she dares not leave me behind in this cruel world. I don't want to stay without her. I will go with her if she wants me, if she takes me. Mama, give me your hand. But she says, you have a daughter too, I won't take you with me. But I scream, I want to be a daughter, not a mother, take me with you: we will make a beautiful life somewhere out there. I love you, I know that nobody ever will take care of me as you did, and that nobody ever took care of you as they should have, as you have taken care of me and everyone else. That is maternity and Matrimony, that is why the meaning of that word is opposed Patrimony. Her eyes are slowly closing, she cannot stand the light, the sight of me. Too much love, I know and she doesn't want to take me with her, but I will come anyway, there is nothing strong enough to keep me here, on earth, among duties, criticism, love with boundaries.

Oh, that soft sweet smell of us together drinking wine and eating mozzarella with tomato on the beach in Italy. Yes, we will go there again some day, I tell her. All deaths are similar, maybe even the same, but not that of your only mother. It is always new and different and singular, as bad as the worst catastrophe on earth.

What hurts is the memory of how she took care of me, of everybody, and how even now nobody wants to take care of her. Everybody around her, me included, is sulking, is mourning, because she cannot take care of us anymore. And she too, she is not used to taking, only to giving. She doesn't want me to wash her, to feed her... with a thin but stern

voice she says: take the jam out of the closet, it is very good, much better than the ones you buy. I made it all for you and your family. It is a reproach, a reprimand, but also a huge invocation for love: to love and be loved, the way she feels it. My God, all the books I wrote against men, against my father, against women like her were not only wrong, but criminal. Will I, as St Augustine, burn my books and write The Book? I just cry and cry whenever I think of her and her life, of family life. That life is over: my granny, my aunt, my cousin, and now her. When she goes it will be forever. I will have to let her go. My friend Ana said, you must, and I know she is right. We must let our mothers go, even if we don't have daughters, our mothers need free time and free space. They never had it otherwise in life, living with their men and children in a men's world. Only when dying do they know that they never were free but they don't mind, they don't need anything but few more seconds of their old life: with our faces around. I will never forget her face. My daughter's secret wish when she was young was to die together with me, her mama. Then growing up, she changed her wish so that I, her mama should die with her, so that we could live longer... But I must teach her, now that she is becoming a big girl, that she must let me go, by letting her go her own way first. My mother never let me go, she was with me as a baby, as a kid, as a grownup, living my life for me, instead of me... taking my life away from me, to protect me, to make up for her lost life in another time, another society. Oh, yes, I wrote books against my mother and women and men like her, but here I am dying now with them, with her. I still love them, and I will write about them. They deserve that, that will be my revenge for not letting me go in time, for not letting me live apart from them, even though they knew they must die first. Or maybe they didn't know that? They were eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent as I imagined them, as I still want them to be.

My psychoanalyst said: your mother was a cold woman. I repeat, a child can never have a cold mother, nor a dead one, nor an invisible one. Mother is a space and a child is a hearth of life. As I have said in other death hours in my life: I wish I was pregnant.

Future, present and past coexist: time just is. Death lives in me with me in front of my eyes wide shut. I am dead Nefertiti, my dying mother, myself and my daughter, yet unborn. What can I make out of it?

Theory of relativity: no free will, the future is already set in a parallel life, as the past.

Quantum physics: random atom theory, uncertainty of the course to take...

The consciousness of a human: I don't know if time flows, I only feel it. Human brain, the atoms in human brain, the consciousness links them, equally mysterious, to time, but is an invisible link.

The link between Nefertiti, my mother and me.

Day -2

Death is holding her by one hand. Last night she survived but terror is still in her face and a look far away from daily things, from my love for her, from the sun shining outside. She thinks only she knows what has happened to her, and she wants to re-establish the good old mother and daughter distance. She is extremely dignified and proud: she doesn't want me to see the humiliating moments she shares with the nurse. She kicks me out: she reminds me of the dying Proust, of the dying Kafka, of my favorite writers and yet, she reminds me of my grandmother who took care of me as a baby, of my aunt, of my young beautiful cousin who died in my presence of AIDS. All the beautiful and damned women of my family. I guess I am not one of them: they despised me and worshipped me for my vitality and mobility. And vice versa: but they were not aware of my inner eye watching them all the time, not only worshipping or fighting them. My women.

My father is an outsider, he always has been, even in his own near-dying moment: he spoke of duties, inheritance, flats, papers... And he cried like a frightened baby clinging to me as to a mama. My mother is fighting alone with death in her consciousness, in her nightmares ... Could these bad things happen to a lady like me, she wonders? Yes, she was an iron lady, a golden lady, a lady Macbeth, but still a lady. Not like me: with utmost cruelty she saw no lady in me, not even at her deathbed, and yet she tried so hard. Wrong material, I guess. Ladies are born, not made of plastic. Like queens. Now, I see reproach in her eyes, of me, of all of me, from all my life. I like that, she is on her own, letting me go, finally. Finally I will survive her death. She is critical of me, she doesn't want to hear of my work, of my joys with which I want to cheer her, only of my duties. She doesn't want me to tell her a tender goodbye and a thank you. We never had that kind of

communication. She decided that: she used to say, Mina was a difficult child, always silent and critical, one could not get close to her.

I always thought it must have been my fault. I hold her tiny hand, without wedding rings, the ones she gave me coming to the hospital. We are all together, she is back home, my small but firm family: no regrets, no words... just deeds. So different from families where things happen quickly and with words. My family is a family from my favorite films and bad dreams. I let my daughter out of that family, I want her different, I want her free. I didn't want my family to abuse her as they did me. And yet I feel, after all, not abused, only used. I guess that is what time does: a good and a bad job.

Day -1

She is in pain, I am trembling with nervousness but no pain. Should I feel her pain too? Am I guilty of a lack of compassion? When my daughter was feeling pain, I just couldn't stand it anymore, I said then: well, who cares, if she dies, I will too. But then it was all over, no pain, no sense of guilt. But now it is different, if my mother dies, I must live on, for my daughter. So I must share the pain. Who is hurting her now: the system, the doctors, the hospitals, her own carelessness, me? I guess too much thinking doesn't give insight, only more questions. I want to feel her pain, to be in labor with her, to be in delivery with her when she delivered me. I remember her coming into the delivery room when I had my baby. They kicked her out, but she managed to penetrate the institution to hold my hand. I didn't want that then but I now want to share her pain. She wants me out of the room, there will be no sharing of pain: she is the mother, I am the daughter: distance and boundaries. I admire her dignity, or is it just coldness?

Day 0

Today I feel nothing, I take no drinks, no food: I am getting thinner and thinner, together with her. My father has left us, he started eating again after losing 15 pounds. Well, he is a man. I said to her, Karen Blixen lived 20 years on champagne, why shouldn't we on beer. We like beer, it is cheap, it is healthy, it takes away the deadly thirst and calms broken nerves. You sleep well after beer. She said, yes, and here we are drinking beer: she on her

deathbed with straws coming out of her nose and me on the terrace, smoking a cigarette. As when I had my baby and stayed with her, I smoked and drank on the terrace, not to disturb the baby sanctuary with my vices. At that time I thought I was vice in persona, someone to be banned.

I have cured several moribund patients, the latest one is my mother: last night she nearly died but I did not let her go. Along with her, my vices will disappear and I will go straight to heaven, too free to be free. I kissed her lovely skull and smoothed her rich hair, not yet white. She stayed with us and she is not possessed anymore: she has no pain, no temperature, no memory of what happened last night. Even the doctors today cannot tell what happened last night: they say it was a miracle, old people are just like that, they survive as if in a fairy tale. Well, I know better: the devil was in my mother, it always was there, but last night he took her voice, preaching and screaming. I fought like a saint against the Devil in my mother: the Devil as my mother. Finally I know, it is her who is possessed, not me.

Day 1

She taught me life, she gave me life. She taught me death. She died. Peacefully, she got her five minutes of heaven. She died in her sleep and she seemed a little girl afterwards. In those few minutes of heaven, from a very old lady - struggling with the invisible strength of death behind her back, her eyeballs white - she became a peaceful little girl singing nursery rhymes. Do children become old when they die? I didn't see her dead, I gave her favorite dress and shoes to the nurses who dressed her. I kissed her still alive, warm face the day before, on Sunday. I was born on Sunday, she gave me life on a Sunday in a snowy tempest, and she left me one Monday morning, another snowy day. Early in the morning, both. Her time of life was early in the morning, but usually, she overslept.

While dying she wasn't courageous, neither while giving birth. The doctors said so. In straight everyday life, she was tough and courageous, a hero. The opposite of me. Will I die courageously? I think I will. I kept saying to everybody crying over her: now, pull yourself together, as if it was their mother not mine. I remember crying over somebody else's father as if he were mine, because I was thinking of this day when I will not have the

luxury of crying, where I will just have to pull myself together and roll on. For the sake of life, as she taught me.

Well, I feel strange, lonely as if I miss a tree in the other hemisphere of the world, a tree I never saw and will never see. She was distant from me always but now she is nowhere. Not even distant. I miss her absence, her void. But I am recovering my spiritual life where she lives more than ever. My only constant fear is: is she really dead, is her body really dead? They covered her, they closed her in a coffin, they will burn her. She always feared suffocation, I fear for her. I want her to have her eternity of heavenly breath...

The doctors, the nurses, they all say: we thought she would make it. How come I didn't? Did I see something they didn't. That look in her eyes that I saw in my dying aunt's eye, in my dying cousin's face? The family dying look, on the feminine side. We see it among ourselves, it is invisible for doctors and outsiders. My mother was saying, I am afraid, do not leave me, stay with me, sleep here with me. That was not my mother, she would never have said that to me. I miss her voice and her stern dogmatic outlook on my loose life. I cannot forgive myself that I didn't lie down next to her as she asked me. I sat on the bed next to her and let her go without me. Did I kill her by letting her go?

My wish on seeing the first snow was: sky above me, let her survive another winter, another summer, another birthday, and then I will seriously let her go. I made a promise I would not be able to keep and the sky didn't trust me. Justly. So I let her go immediately and I killed her softly. I am suffering, I am suffering terribly and you all know how it is. Everybody has a mother, alive or dead and everybody understands me. I didn't know it was universal, I didn't know it had a feminine side to it. It was too obvious to know. Last beer and last breath.

Day 2

The funeral: my first. She would have laughed and made fun of us, I felt like visiting all the funerals happening in the huge central cemetery of Belgrade and taking part in them. They were all mine, she was everywhere dominating the scene. Our funeral parlor was big, as nice as a ball room, with beautiful flowers, pretty young cousins and a smart coffin. She

was a fine lady lying there in the big public parlor, only hers for one hour and five minutes. Five minutes of heaven, she asked.

I visited all the other funerals and took part. She was everywhere.

Day 7th

A week later: the time of loneliness has become my time. It is a time of very perverse happiness. Time is flattening, tenses combined into one new tense, all impregnated with the softness of her skin and the odor of her body. The last day, I kissed her and I patted her hair, the sharpness of her thick hair is still hanging onto my hand. It itches sometimes, the palm. I remember her mostly at the age I am now, I hardly remember her old. I could not stand the idea of her body decaying, of it being burnt, as it was. I think she is murdered: somewhere behind the reality of her death lies my conviction of murder by natural death. I fear her being suffocated to death, even though they said she died peacefully. I had a strong urge to keep her body before me to be sure it didn't come back to life before being burnt. Well, I didn't do it: I am an accomplice of murderous death. Something stopped me, civilization, middle class values, shame...I still haven't let her go completely: time must do something for the two of us, to bring us together again. Shall I follow her: lie down my baby, lie down with me, or shall I forget her? And others who lost a mother they didn't get along with, who were old and sick and died naturally, those others say: it never ends, you will never forget nor get over it, but must live with it.

Day seven is a bad day, maybe because it was our day. On the seventh day she gave birth to me on a snowy day as these days are now. My daughter and I, we have our days in the hot summer, days of 40 degrees C. My daughter is somewhere way out of my deep grief these days. And she wants to be away from the two of us, one dead one alive. But I know I must help her stay strong as my mother did for me. My life, again, as when I gave birth, becomes important, with my mother's death. Matrimonial line. No space for other emotions these days.

My father shares my emotions: he is blessed with pain. He stares with a shining face and brilliant eyes as images of youth and happiness swirl in front of him. He feels dizzy and goes to lie down, happy with his dreams.

Day seven is a bad day for me: energy is flowing from my lower belly towards my legs. I am lonely, Mama, I am not pregnant, and I miss you. I feel guilty for not spending time with you: I wear your clothes because I feel guilty for not kissing you enough, for not supporting you enough against all the men of the world, our only common enemy, otherwise we were on different sides all the time, with different men and ideas. Do you feel lonely or guilty somewhere out there?

Day 8

My cousin said: I lost my earrings, somebody from our family must have them, I am so worried, they are the only memory of my grandma.

I answered: don't worry, I will ask my mother tonight.

My cousin started crying. I said: don't worry. She said: Your mother?

I realized that my mother was dead, that I had forgotten it. But I could actually ask my mother, even dead, as I ask my I Ching. I am not crazy. My mother is not dead for me, I have all her thoughts somewhere in my head.

Day towards the end

I am letting her go physically: I have her photo in front of me, a middle-aged photo taken when I was 15, as my daughter today, and she was of my age. That will be our eternity, her middle age and mine, when we parted. I let her body go, it will be burned, as she wanted. She must have been crazy, an atheist, a communist, and a crazy woman. Her body was a warm body with a vast forehead and beautiful blue violet eyes, I am kissing and holding her distorted hand in my mind, so small you can hardly believe it and saying good bye my sweet lady. She lives somewhere else now: energy never dies. She is in my dreams. But

was body more important, was that the work of art of human life and nature? I wish she had taken me with her and I wish I didn't have a daughter. I cannot stand this separation once again: I am a crazy woman, too.

Day of drowning, sinking

I read a book by my friend, he taped his mother, he listened to her, he respected the Other. My God, I never listened to mine but to contradict her. She wasn't an angel. We never got along, but she was telling her story, and I, her only daughter, a writer, a woman to a woman, was the only one who could have listened to her. I know that nobody ever listened to her, the youngest child, the wife of an authoritarian husband, the mother of a spoiled foreign daughter... I knew she intruded in my life, she tried to take it away from me, to lead me, to command me, to abuse me, but she never made me listen to her, to her small talk, of how you make a simple cake that children like, of how to plant a flower, of how to cope with small lies in big deeds. Though she never believed in God she would say: dreams are lies, God is the truth when dreams are bad because her mother used to say that to her, but she never believed in God. Mother, I never listened to you because I loved you, I am not a bad girl. I must remember everything, every little thing I still can, for my sanity, because I am going crazy without you. I will start anew, day by day, but every day I will remember something of you and write it down, something small, simple, a true truth. Sorry for not having it done while you were here and you could have appreciated it but probably you wouldn't have, because you taught me: never a weakness, never a leak. So now that you are gone, I am free to be weak and to cry.

Day 1 Starting anew

The thing I want to remember forever is the way you treated terrible things: you would say shoo shoo at death. You would say with your calm voice (that voice I must record, know, remember): don't be so hard on him, he is your father. Or don't be so angry, it will pass. Or, I hope today a bomb doesn't fall on our flat, it would be a nuisance that something happens whilst these nice people are here (celebrating your 50th anniversary).

Her crooked fingers knitting, sewing, inventing patterns for my cardigans. Me always haughty, looking down on her work but wearing only those. She knew that too well, she saw me wearing them and that is why she made more and more of them.

I wish you were different: I wish you spent less time with me, I wish you didn't intrude in my love, you didn't harass me, you didn't abuse my intimacy. Or is this something else I misjudged? I have a feeling I know your answers, those you never told me, they are me now.

Your dresses still hang all around our house, with flowers. Your smart clothes are in the closets, as always, this other life of yours, hidden.

They say it takes one cycle, one circle, to close the open wound: to do everything we used to do together, for the first but not last time alone. They say usually one year is the measure of time: that will be the measure of my writing, day by day, as observing a clepsydra in a desert...

Today marks three weeks that she is gone: yesterday three weeks that I spoke to her, but how many days have gone by since I heard her true voice, since she got sick, maybe seven weeks? Maybe she was never herself at all, that self I fantasized about as a fixed, continuous person, object of my immense love. She was imperfect, my God she was changing too: looking at her photos today I noticed that she was aging, that she was probably seriously sick, though she never told me or anybody else that. We never listened to her, we never took her seriously. I tried, but I was only successful in loving her or hating her: she was my boss, my big boss, my queen, my goddess. If she weren't, I would have cured her.

Her voice, let me remember her voice and our last conversation: me in the Zurich airport, nervous, waiting for a flight, tired and eager to get back home to my daughter. My mother says: don't worry, she just came here and she is all right, don't worry, everything is under control. I went to the lobby and took a drink. I was calm, my mother was handling my fear, my situation, with her fear, with her calm voice, with my daughter, her granddaughter as if it were her daughter, not mine. As if she were me. How I hated that then, but now, I know I

was wrong. Nobody else will ever take care of my daughter as of me as if her daughter. I am alone, I am guilty, and I do not feel free as I thought I would. A huge amount of blindness and pain is overcoming me, and somebody else will profit. Somebody who doesn't deserve it. Somebody who doesn't love me as you did. Somebody who will wear your clothes, your small shoes, spend your money... You never cared about those things. What you cared about, you lost and that is why you are gone, leaving us here. But you did want to live, I saw it in your eyes, in your pain, it was a lively pain of a dying woman who could live forever if she only had another body. Your inner strength never faded, your faith in happiness, in good food, in good will and hope. If I could have given you, half of my body I would have done it, but you would never have taken it. But how cruel nature is for those of us born of nature.

And all the time, while I write, I cry. Do I write to cry or to drain my tears? I don't know why I write. As always when I write, I do it against some bigger Loss.

Day, I do not know

My daughter fights with me all the time: but when I have to change the light bulb she says, no, it is dangerous I will do it. But it is my turn now, I let my mama go, someday you will have to let me go too. No, never, says she with passion; I will hold on to you, so if you go, I will go with you. I think of her crazy, tender little life: did I ever think of the possibility of letting her go, away somewhere without me? Oh, yes, a thousand times, that is a mother's love and care.

I dreamt of my mother, I shivered and sweat: it was a bad night with a bad rainy day that made me sleep all the time and think of her. But I have a lot of energy and eyes wide open. I see too much a lack of tolerance, lack of love, too much envy, hate...jealousy, even in myself.

Day whatever,

because I speak of pain: it is the pain which is unbearable, not the loss. I can deal with the loss but not with the idea of it, it sharpens my senses and makes me bleed, scream, as if my

skin is torn off my body. My skin, the deepest part of my body, the surface of all of my body, suffering sharp pain from the touch of a breeze: yes, she felt pain on her toes when a linen sheet covered them, so I held it away from her. She knew about pain, she was a doctor, all of her life dealing with somebody else's pain now becoming hers. And now her pain has become mine, she is free of pain because I set her free. It is natural, unbearable. And I will have to go on speaking words, moving my feet, laughing...and performing all the physiological deeds of survival.

Conscience exists, it survives physical death: if the body of our dead haunts us, even when decayed, or burned, if our deeds or lack of good deeds still haunt us after death, if we feel sorry for saying or not saying things, then conscience exists beyond death, which means it negates the death. She asked me to lay down next to her: I didn't lie down. To ease my conscience, I spent her last hours with her, but I didn't say I loved her. My conscience aches.

December 31 will mark forty days that her body is gone: according to Orthodox religion the soul wanders about its earthly habitat for forty days after the physical death of the body. My mother will never step into the new millennium. January first, I may discard some of her things, so they say. They say I must, to make space for new people of flesh and blood who need space to eat and drink and sleep: they are material, they have needs. I remember her telling me, shortly before she fell ill, how she overheard some relatives speaking of her as if she weren't present. And then, they saw her: they knew she was there and that she heard what she shouldn't have, but they didn't say a word. Can you imagine how I felt, she said, as if I didn't exist? That is exactly how I feel today, having to move her things, as if she didn't exist anymore.

I spoke badly of her last night: I remembered how cruel she was to me, how she left me alone at a moment when having a mother made a big difference. How she made other people leave me and how she supported people against me. Later, when she realized she was wrong, she didn't say she was sorry. She always had a big problem with blame and guilt: she never wanted to be wrong or guilty so she passed the blame on to the weaker, and usually it was me. Even today I easily accept that role. My daughter, ever since she

could speak wanted to be guilty, as if I passed my role on to her with language. After speaking badly of her, I felt better, I felt very light and for the first time since she got sick, I felt a tiny dash of potential happiness: maybe one day, it will come back to me.

Have I said I sleep like a log since she died?

I left her that Sunday, after 20 steps, I wanted go back to her, but I went on. I don't know why, every day was her last day, as far as my fears were concerned, ever since I was born. And I always left her as if it were her last day; to go to play, to go to school, to have my own baby, to write, to lead my own life. I always came back, guilty for having left her, unhappy while doing things elsewhere, incredulous that other people called that MY OWN LIFE. That last day I left her without turning back and now I have no place to go back to. I am looking for her everywhere. In the bed where she died there is no trace of her, already somebody else is sleeping in it and only my pain traces her tiny body suffering at that spot, without a trace on the covers. Time heals pain, they say, time heals and erases everything, good and bad memories, the things we want to forget as well as those we want to keep. I must put something to mark that spot where her life left her, to hold the place for return.

Day

I am eating her food, I am drinking her drinks, my physiology is changing, am I losing my mind? No, I am getting closer to her, now I will finally snatch her and swallow her: she will be mine, she will be me.

Those beautiful eyes are gone, that warm forehead I touched that last day; I have her clothes, I have to clean out her cupboards. My father is already on his way out of her rhythm, out of her odor. The closer I get, the farther he is: he is a man I am a woman, he is a husband I am a daughter, we have a different inheritance: mine is forever , his nevermore.

I listen to her music, her perfect pitch echoes, one of the few things she had perfect, but I loved all the rest better: her foul language, her cruelty, her neverending reprimands. I will carry her atheist cruelty all my life with pride

My writing of her is measured with pain: today I had to make a decision, to write or to forget. I made a decision to forget. To run away and forget. Now my writing is interfering with forgetting her. I survived wars, I survived death. But will I survive this? The oblivion?

Day

Tomorrow is funeral Part II. My mama will be in a vase in front of me, her ashes, as they say. And then we will bury the vase with her ashes. They say. I do not believe my mama has become ashes. Even if I believed it possible I cannot be sure these are her ashes. There is no way to tell the difference between her ashes and somebody else's or between her dust and dust itself, between her and the rest of the world. Is that death? Was her desire to be burned a desire to affirm death? Like many of her ideas, I hate that idea too. She denied her body to me in life, and her body that gave me birth has now left me. I have nothing in my hand. I started crying yesterday when I heard that we will be burying her ashes. I had never considered of what we would be doing tomorrow. I cleaned the car for the guests, prepared a meal, dressed in black...I should have at least cut some of her beautiful sharp hair at the spot I often touched when she was sick, up to the night before she died. I have nothing to hold on to, to touch, I do not only want to remember, I want a material proof of her existence. Otherwise I could invent everything, as I usually do, my stories always change as I remember different things, I color emotionally my stories, seeking the truth. And that brings distortion and lack of truth. But I never invent things on purpose. Some people don't, some people are scientists, they have proofs and objective views, and my mother was one of them. She would have kept my hair, had I died first. I guess she would have survived my death, but I am not sure I will hers. My daughter thinks the same, she thinks that daughters cannot survive their mothers' deaths whilst the contrary is easier. Maybe there is some truth to it: mothers give life to their children, thus can deal with their death too. But children just come into life by somebody else's will, they are impotent to fight their creators.

Every day is easier without her, she is on a cloud moving somewhere above my head, depending on the weather, she is sometimes close, flying low, sometimes far away, beyond my vision. But she is always here, and somehow, never here. It will be a terrible blow to see her vase tomorrow, without even her hair in my hand. But then, even more, I would

love to touch and see her violet eyes: those famous eyes. The cruelest killers keep the eyes of their victims as a trophy, daughters should keep the eyes of their mother as body that never sleeps.

I am wearing the sweater she knitted for herself this summer, the very last thing her twisted rheumatic fingers knitted. Her curved fingers are knitted into the texture, the sweater is touching me caressing me as I watch TV every afternoon, dozing off, but not sleeping. She used to tell me about her mother, my granny, how she never slept because she never had time: she wasn't poor just busy and mother of six. She wanted to do by herself everything for her husband and her children. So during the night she would knit: a small thin woman with long white wavy hair, big blue eyes and twisted fingers too. Sometimes in the morning, when I see myself in the mirror I look like her, and some other times like my other granny: a tall, big, red-haired woman with white skin unwrinkled and light blue eyes. A mountain, not a woman. But for me small is pretty, because my mother was small and pretty. And wrinkled is pretty, because my mother was wrinkled and twisted fingers are pretty because my mother knitted with her twisted fingers to the very last day of her life in order to live on through sweaters.

Had I ever loved her as I do now? I guess not, I never even realized I loved her. I only remember nightmares in which she was dead and I screaming and sweating. Nightmares I could awaken from, until one day they became truth. Nightmares can always become truth and usually they do. My sweat and scream in sleep even though she is dead is a nightmare that she might die.

Day

I saw her in the vase, I saw the vase, but I also saw her in it. I remember , when I was eight , living in Cairo, I asked my Japanese girlfriend from next door: where is your Mom, I haven't seen her for four days. She ran to her living room and brought me a vase, now she lives here, she said very serious but with a smile.

Is my intimacy still intimate? Is she controlling it now, guarding me? Is she with her parents again, waiting for me? I told her, stay with me, but her twisted fingers, the open

wounds on her limbs , her artificial breath, and my father's fear to enter the room... well, I guess all that prevailed over the decision of a true lady. Is she watching me?

The gray vase bore her name and her dates of birth and death, as well as a code number. They wanted me to place the vase solemnly inside the tomb. I refused to touch the vase, I just stared at it on the cheap red tablecloth which was meant to signify sobriety and decor. The message didn't reach me. Iced rain was freezing and blurring our vision, already blurred by tears.

No, mother, you wouldn't have liked this, all of us together in the rain crying and getting sick and feeling sad. So, home we went to eat and drink as you would have wanted us to. I spoke of your mother and father and your sister and brothers with your relatives. And I made them speak of your family house, of the famous garden you always described with presumption as the most beautiful in the world, as the symbol of your proud youth and the nation you belonged to. A metaphor you always carried throughout the big wild world my father made you travel: your garden, order and natural beauty. Our life was somewhere else, as a true bride you had to follow your wild husband and bear him a wild child in a foreign country, raised on foreign food and words, in big cities with barren pavements. But we made it together, somehow I belong to your garden too. My name is that of a flower. I will go to your grave, and be your flower.

Just behind your grave there are graves of some of your friends. Friends you dismissed with words like: poor dear, she suffered so much, or poor friend, such an honest worker etc. Poor me, with all this death banality, poor you for not being able to eat your favorite dishes with us anymore, poor, poor is the world for not dealing with death properly as it should.

Just shedding tears: New Year's Eve without her homemade cake, without her Russian salad, without her intrusion in my privacy: what a wasteland without her bravery to intrude. Am I a victim or the winner of our great love which everybody who is born to a mother shares? My criterion these days in judging people is: do they have a mother or not. Of course they all did once, but haven't her now? For example, Anna Karenina didn't and her tragedy is part of that story too. My mother's world has fallen apart, she left in time to avoid seeing it crumble, and her soul left exactly the last day of the past millennium. Now I

can remove her things: her creams, her crutches, the bedclothes she loved best that I bought her in Bologna a year ago. She bought me things and I bought for her. My daughter and I do it exactly the same way. But we all have stopped spoiling each other since she died...And now I understand her telling me passionately: spoil your daughter, don't be as tough as I was with you when you were a kid, always working, always tired, always nervous with you because of the sick children I cared for as a doctor...A girl's most precious Matrimony/dowry is to be spoiled by her mother, then she will be able to give love to her children too...

As I cry, I notice nobody else is crying anymore and I wonder, will I stop, as they did, or will it get worse and worse as life gets tougher, making me more vulnerable.

Tomorrow is your birthday: Your flat is losing your odor, that sweet scent of your body, of your taste. I am taking things out of your room bit by bit to preserve something of your odor in my home. Tomorrow you will not attend your birthday as you did last year, when I was rude. This year, everybody is behaving, silence and obedience are reigning around your empty chair, while we eat your food made by somebody else's hands, while we speak of your ideas which you can no longer defend . We do not attack them, don't worry, not anymore, they are fading away without your strength. If dictators are falling without your strength to support them, how will I still be able to stand ?

I look at your photo but I don't cry anymore, I have your support, your strength but without your limits, restraints, reprimands. Dead, you have become ideal, as most women do.

Day 2000

Sheer pain, to put it bluntly. Because my mother is dead. An old woman she, an old woman I, still it doesn't help, not at all. A new phase in our relationship is approaching: I am reaching now the longest length of time we ever were apart. As a baby, she left me for six weeks, God only knows why. I stopped communicating in her absence and I postponed

speaking because of it. She even took me to the psychiatrist, wondering...Could she really wonder about such an obvious matter? I refused to recognize her on her return, then all of a sudden I squeezed her hysterically in my arms and didn't let her go hysterically for hours. That was, I guess, the greatest sensation of absence in my life. I remember it now vividly, after many years it has become real no longer just a memory. As a baby I thought it was real, but only now real. Maybe according to Einstein's time space theory she is still living in a parallel time, as I am dead in some other parallel. It helps, as a scientist said when he lost his son, it sure helps to know she is still somewhere out there and that it is only my inadequate mind stopping me from reaching her, for the time being. But some day I will. I am no longer concerned with my writing, with my living loves. All of my talents are now concentrated on that formula: to reach out for the dead, for all those who left us orphans behind.

After exactly six weeks I think I should start to remember her apart from my life, as if she had her own: but only traces of that life are coming back to me, and then only in my dreams. Still nightmares in which I am resolved that there is no border between life and death, that we are still together, and since she is not existing as a being anymore then I must be non-existent too. I know it, I feel it, for sure. Then I sleep like a log, wet in the sweet sweat of reunion in death.

My writer friend, writing about his mother's death, was saying all the time: this is all about her, not about me, censoring himself all the time. On the contrary, I keep saying, this is about me, not about her, her death is mine death too. I am a woman who writes and my friend is a male writer. And of course, he speaks about himself all the time: I can tell you that because I knew his mother very well and that woman is not in his book any more than mine is in my book. Maybe our mothers are somewhere else together, and I am with them though I stayed behind, to write and preach.

I have to use a date, why on earth have I dropped time when speaking of her, as if she were an eternity? As the days continue to drip I am losing her into eternity through dates as drops, as the only measurement of her being in life. By the calendar today is January 13,

2000 and she died November 22nd, 1999, exactly six weeks and three days ago, and I feel worse today than then.

Last night I went through her closet. I was obliged to do so by my father, to clean it and set it free for his relative who will stay with him: good news. I did it with my daughter after taking a tranquilizer: in a big haste of laughter and love, we joked, we praised her taste in clothing, and we got through it. People just do it, good and bad things, not all think about the things they are doing, before or after. But my father was trembling all the time, he took his pills; my daughter was spoiled as ever, childish, innocent, but cruel... and I had to drink and drink in order to get drunk and forget and do it without thinking. But I couldn't stop thinking and I thought: "she always supported me but I never saw it."

This monumental realization came from her closet. Behind the knitting stuff and old handbags she kept my papers and films: my early works. I was ashamed of them and I thought I had thrown them away. Only a few weeks ago, her best friend, an old lady who adores her own daughter and never kept it a secret as my mother did, told me: you mother was so proud of your artistic career, she loved your writing, she always supported you with your father, who was against it. But she never told me that and I was stupid enough not to see it; I fought her as much as my father, even more because she had no arguments, because she was a woman, his woman first and my mother only after. I left home to fight for my artistic life, for my freedom to be bad, but I was never that neither, nor free nor bad, only she didn't know it. Was that the game we were playing, pretending not to know? I didn't play any game, I was her guinea pig: she made me a princess, an artist, a fool... Was that the price of my art?

I moved her lovely clothes like masterpieces to another closet: the whole world closed with those doors. I realized an important thing regarding the present: I never liked my present nor even lived in it, even with her I was looking for a brighter past in my imagination. As a child I was looking back, never forwards. As a grown up person, with her clothes in my cupboard, I will never be free of her. Was that the game she was playing, is that the game we should play without knowing or thinking? I do love you mother, still, as much as ever, no matter what you did or will do to me, you are my oldest love. Even if you kill me, I will say I wanted it.

January 14th

We are alone, my father and I, in our sameness: we quarrel and we empathize, again we have the same dreams, of terror and motherless children. He forgot how to be a father to me, I forgot how to be a daughter to him, we suffer without concealing the pain, but also without understanding it. Without her we move more easily. We act quickly, but we get lost and we lose our joy on the way to success. I think: him or her, whom would I sacrifice had I had the choice? I guess both. I was a rebel child, that is my script of a rebel, without knowing the cause.

You don't know what a hell of a time I had with you, said my mother, it was not easy to bring up such a strange and stubborn child as you were. You refused to communicate with me, she went on, with tears in her eyes. I was astonished with anger: well, I was a child, it was your problem , not mine.

Tonight I see it differently: Virginia Woolf's mother, Hitler's mother, my mother...Did they all have an equal task? I remember that I knew how to drive her crazy, faking a stomach attack, and how I lied to avoid going to kindergarten, and how I ate raw potatoes to raise my body temperature and draw her attention as a doctor away from other sick children. She must have realized that I was faking, but what then? When you realize your child is capable of such a thing, what next? She definitely was afraid of my strength and silence and of what I might do next. And I never knew what she might do next. Mother, that was our curse.

Day January 16th, Sunday

Tomorrow at 7.20 a.m. it will be 7 weeks that you are gone. I was born at 7.55 a.m. on a Sunday. I am taking your things rapidly from your closet, your night table, your room, your former flat where your former husband, my father is fighting for his life. Oh, he is desperate without you, don't worry, both of us remember you as gentle, subtle knitting, a mundane aristocracy. But I am not suffering any longer with your things: I am packing them and piling them in my small flat. I am bringing you into my small flat to live with me. If you hadn't died first but he had, as we all expected , that would have been so, you

would have come here, for ever, without that feeling of divorce that widowers have. I am piling your documents and photos under my table, in my bathroom your soaps and creams, on my body your clothes (soft and silk sweaters and blouses) in my corridor, a huge elegant silk umbrella. Sometimes I feel like leaving it all behind, taking an umbrella and going off like Charlie Chaplin with a smile and you, down the road.

We are the same, my father and I, we are getting closer without her, sharper... In USA they cloned a monkey from another monkey: identical, sisters, mother and daughter...Like my father and I at this moment, two identical monkeys, in a perverse relationship of identity. She is nowhere about, his wife and my mother in a traditional way, as things used to be, before monkeys were cloned out of monkeys...

Arkan the big Serbian killer, has been finally killed. His funeral was a big nationalist and patriotic show; held in the same place where my mother was buried. His wife and his family pretended they were not family of a killer, of a war criminal, of a man who pulled out the eyes of people of other ethnic backgrounds, literally. His young wife, a folk singer wore a fur coat and was without make-up, as never before: I do that all the time. She walked like the British queen or Princess Diana. I couldn't walk, I ran around in circles, like a mechanical rabbit. His oldest son, who grew up abroad, far from the dirty family money, and whose mother was killed by his father, gave a speech. At the same cemetery, at the same place...I couldn't give a speech to my mother. My father tried, but he failed, too: his voice broke into sobs and his knees trembled when he kneeled down to kiss the coffin.

Playing dignity and being dignified, monkeys and men...

January 29th, 2000

I am at the Budapest airport waiting for 7.20 a.m. flight to Milan, a city where I lived with my mother many years ago. I am wearing her clothes: this is my first trip without her waiting somewhere for me. Women of her age rarely travel alone, yet I see here some who

could be my mother. I remember phoning her from Zurich a few months ago, I still have some of the coins because I interrupted her, to not use all the money. I made her speak quickly of my daughter. I didn't ask her how she felt. She said however, everything is fine don't worry, enjoy yourself . But she would always say that. Deep down in my heart I had known for some time that it was a miracle that she was still alive. I remember the last time we were in an airport together: we were hurrying to Milan where my father was dying of a sudden heart attack. She was crying all the time, yet neatly dressed as a lady, and she forgot to take her passport. They held the plane for us and let her leave without it. I was amazed at her style. Now 18 years later I am wearing her sweater, using her perfume, carrying her purse, and wondering if I didn't forget my passport. I am finally a true lady too. But they wouldn't have let me go without a passport, not a Serb in Budapest under sanctions, during wars. But that only means that times have changed, precisely why she had to go: there is no space for true ladies anymore.

Mother, where are you: your granddaughter is coughing, no reprimanding words from you to make her stop, your husband is alone, he hardly remembers your name, the odor in your house, your own home, with every item created by you, is just a decoration. I, your only heir, have betrayed you: I have been away, I have eaten and drank and had fun, speaking of you, as if you were anybody's mother, not only mine, the unique love of my life. Not a tear has been shed for you during the past week, me in Barcelona, the rest of the world forgetting you... I am crying now, I know you are mine, but only mine, finally everybody else has forgotten you... I remember your cold blue eyes, your warm forehead, the smell of your urine...and from this moment on, I will write only of you...The snow is bluish and icy, the food you left for us in the deep freeze is becoming anonymous... I must learn how to cook, how to bake, to take your body, your love into me. Only I care enough for that.

February 1st

It is sunny, the air is fresh and beautiful, I am enjoying life, which is denied to you, I am enjoying it without you, I look at your photograph, I imagine you somewhere you love . But last night we were far apart, I started thinking of you again as somebody bad, as somebody who ruined my life, as I used to think. As a possessive, authoritarian mother who took over my life, my rights, my body, occupied it like a foreign power.

This morning with this sun, I realized that whatever you did, I have no choice anymore, that is the only life I had, the only Matrimony. The only child I had it, I had it with you, my daughter, and the only child you had it was me, your daughter. We used our men, you did it intentionally, I didn't. I used them under your influence, but still I used them. When I thought about having another baby, you said no, that I did not waste it. Because only you took care of my body, not to be wasted. If you had survived my father, everything would have been the same today in our lives. We would be missing him, as a good guy or bad one, but our home would have the same odor, the same food, the same rules that you made us believe were his, the rules you trapped us into. I know for sure you ruled your home and our world: every woman who has at least one child does so. But you pretended it was him. The fraud has been discovered, because his home is not our or your home anymore. After only two months it smells of Herzegovina sheep, it follows a different language and I do not visit it anymore. It is not barren, it is full of squatters and heirs of something that belonged to you. And again you make me cry, the thought of you, the thought that without you a world has withered, that I lost my self confidence, that I do not love my daughter anymore the way I used to: I love her even more but without pleasure, not being me a daughter myself anymore. Oh mother, mothers should never die.

February 5,2000

I dreamt of my mother last night as if she were alive and we had a big fight the way we used to. I didn't feel sorry for her, on the contrary I felt sorry for myself and was aggressive toward her. Sometimes I used to dream with a big sense of relief of beating up my mother: violence wasn't our way of communication or of communication breakdown. I didn't beat her last night but I was angry with her, with her arrogance and her obstinacy. This morning I remembered her blue eyes, dark blue as only the Adriatic sea in Croatia is. I lost both. She really had beautiful eyes, I thought, everybody saw that. I am cooking,

cleaning, going to the market, reading and writing. But I know it is not yet over: I am wearing her perfume and my house, not my father's now has the odor of her.

I am learning to live alone: not only without her only, I without anybody. Alone by day, alone by night, alone in company and alone when by myself. More than a starting point it seems like a dead end.

February 6th, 2000

A beautiful day, it smells of spring, of your love for nature. I never loved it or related to it, but today I do, through your dead body which has to live through me. I am richer with you dead, heavier, and I have the burden of living two contradictory lives at the same time: mine and yours. But I feel safe with you on my back, I feel rich as when I carried my baby, rich with responsibility and duties. I have the last word, finally, in my life. But Mother, I hardly know what to say. I don't know what has happened, was it the war, the fear, your sudden death, your warm forehead I feel on my palm, your blue eyes staring in front of you, fighting the death away. Every morning at 7 a.m. I am awake no matter at what hour I went to bed: I sit and wait until 8 and then I can go on with my small life. That hour is a cosmic hour. It is a wake. A goodbye or a date with all of you I loved best who have left me: my grandma, my friend, my cousin and now you. What a mess life is, oh what a mess, I say after the wake, and I have so little time or tools to recover the amount of love and beauty I have lost.

I dreamt, or maybe not, maybe I just remembered vividly a true story, or a wishful story... It runs as following: my mother says to me, what lovely nails you have, you stopped biting them and now your hands are beautiful, finally those of a true lady. I felt so lovely. My mother had lovely hands. But I never did. I bit my nails, I did not color them, I played piano and my hands were rough. In my dream, or fantasy, what matters is the vividness of her voice, it bears music and a world of its own. It is a parallel world now for me: I can stay for hours in the dark thinking of my mother, as if I were young and in love.

She came to terms with me at the end: she was forced to. She had to admit: my daughter is a writer, she can speak and write for her own self, be indecent, be public. A writer and My daughter. But it was too late, I was ashamed of being both at the same time. She said to me: don't be ashamed , you are my daughter and a writer, you say in public what you think and you lead your own life. I don't mind you calling me names, I don't mind you leading a dangerous life. But it was too late, I minded already, and I didn't want her to read my stuff, or to watch me on TV. I started writing in languages she couldn't understand and I did not tell her or anybody else of my success. I was ashamed of it, thanks to her. It was too late for me to be happy and be myself at the same time, even though I am grateful to her for coming to terms with me at the very end. At the end, she also said: this is all your doing, yours and the doctors, you all are trying to cure me but instead you are killing me, let me go, please, my dear. Her tone softened pleadingly, finally she was the weak one: please go to the doctor and tell him not to come today, no more medicines...I never acknowledged what we both knew, that she had become the weaker one. She had the benefit of the doubt, at the very end when she came to terms with me, her daughter, a writer...But when raving, she would say, I am afraid for you because of what you do, what you write, all the country is speaking of you, all the nurses in the hospital...And I said, no Mother, not of me. Then she would deliver long coherent political speeches and everybody would listen to her, asking questions. Only I knew that if my mother were in her senses she would never deliver a political speech from a wheelchair in a trauma ward. But I never denied her or told the others the truth: that wasn't our tradition, our relationship was to fight until the very end for the soul of the other. Like two devils. I wanted her to be like me, she wanted me to be like her. We both succeeded to lose.

February 8th, 2000

Please leave me alone, everybody, you too, I am tired of being abused by my own emotions that you implanted in me, love, desperate love, obedience to that love, blind obedience. You never loved me half as much as I will you forever. Set me free, Mother, now that you are gone, set me free from my father, he is eating me in order to stay alive

and survive your death. Fathers do that, you offered your body to save me from him but he is ruthless, he would eat anything on his way to eternity.

February 10th, 2000

A mirror shattered last night, I was alone. It happened to me before, years ago when we broke our deal and you left me. Last night a similar confusion occurred: whilst as usual, my father was eating me like a mythological god. I stood up against him, but I nearly fainted without your shield. Nobody else knows how to protect me. You knew it, but very rarely would you do it. Last night I realized that you abandoned me long before you died. And yet, only your physical death made it clear.

February 11th, 2000

I clean the kitchen, scrape the dishes carefully and put them in the dish-washer. Then I scrub the floor and wash my hands. I put on a special cream to keep them soft, and I sit down in the armchair to relax. My hair is dirty but combed, in a braid. My clothes are old but fancy. While sitting an image crosses my mind, too fast to be caught. I think hard and then another image crosses my mind, actually a story. When I left home I was 21, I knew nothing of housework, I wanted to abandon our family life in which I couldn't breathe. So I left without a suitcase, not to raise suspicion. After some months, you came to visit me: I lived in a very small flat. I didn't realize how shocked you both were at seeing me poor and happy. My father was feeling superior and relaxed seeing me poor, he didn't realize I was happy. He thought that with me being poor he still had a means of keeping me at his side. He tried to bribe me, to control me. I laughed him off, he didn't even notice the sneer. But you, no, you knew very well that you had failed as parents, seeing me so poor and so happy. So you entered my kitchen, took a napkin, a dirty torn one, you put it around your waist, over your silken dress (I remember that it was a warm spring day but my kitchen was cold because I couldn't afford heating) and you started to clean the kitchen; the stove, the basin...You realized you had never taught me how, to be a housewife, a housekeeper. Once again you failed and you wanted to make up for that, and you wanted to tell me you loved me and that you would support me in my new poor life as long as I let you be part of

it . And I did: I hated you for cleaning my kitchen. That was exactly what I needed at that time, a good helping hand in my kitchen , and you bribed me. I couldn't say "no", even though your cleaning was a reproach to my not cleaning, but still everybody needs a clean kitchen, rich or poor.

And thanks Mother, for not blackmailing me with your death, which I assisted: it taught me that it is not hard to die as men always told us: hard to live, hard to die. You made it clear by dying in front of me, loving me, reprimanding me, laughing at me, with me, as usual, as during your life, imperfect and short...But never blackmailing me, never making me suffer even more than life can: you always just cleaned my kitchen, for better or for worse.

15.Feb, 2000

My father is becoming a mean old man without her: Heathcliff, my favorite character from a book. Was she killed by his bad character, as she used to say, or was her bad character making him soft? Or was it both, a symbiotic marriage? I think they were both hard and bad tempered as far as I was concerned, they never let me play, laugh, I had an explicable sad childhood. With her gone, their mechanism became visible. I am angry for the lost energy, for all the things I could have done if I didn't have to fight them. All of my energy was concentrated on survival and here I am , a great warrior against all the evils of the world, especially invisible evils that cause suffering. I am not sure I want you back Mother, I am not even sure that I would prefer to have you instead of him, a bad woman instead of a bad man, I only wish you had stayed together somewhere far away from me, so that he couldn't tell me as he did today: you must...

Or "I want to see your face while I die": I don't want to see anybody's death again, least of all his.

Only fragments of what once used to be called love.

I don't remember loving you, Mother or that you loved me, I just remember scenes that were supposed to mean that. My whole world is without that kind of love, only fragments of illusions. Am I becoming a man?

February 20, 2000

I am becoming bad, I am becoming bad toward you . Okay I decided, I do not have to be one of those who write books of lies about their parents. I have read those books so pathetic, so convincing, so poor when you shed all the tears and look at yourself deep down inside without witnesses. Men's books, art books, literature, whatever...not enough for me, I know better, we know better.

I hated you and you hated me. Very often. And now that you are gone we both feel nothing.

In order to remember you, I am holding my hate against you, I am ready to bring out everything I know, as long as it will bring us together. Because in order to split, first we must meet, and speak the truth. We never managed to while you were still alive. You refused to play truthfully with me in order to preserve the lie which was your life. I understand, I forgive and yet I want to know.

Beware of me, the loving child is becoming a werewolf.

Now listen to this mother: father is behaving as if your house is his, we hardly can move there without his strict surveillance and orders Until the very last I will fight for your house with perfumes against the smell of sheep from Herzegovina. Afterwards I will have to take up heavier weapons. The war between he and I is open now. He is most cruel to me and next to my daughter, your granddaughter, the creature you loved more than me. I see that many of my wishes are fading as time goes by, maybe they were actually yours. They seemed very natural once but I see them now as a wig for my bald head. Bald wishes are mine, you gave them hair.

Mother, what did you do between Father and me, why are we so opposed without you, is he really my Father? He does look like me but he behaves as if you were his only true kin...Why didn't you have more children, why only me: was it an unfortunate case as

Father tells me or your deliberate choice to be free? I still love you, believe me, but I remember you now more precisely and fairly than when you first died.

February 21st, 2000

I find myself turning against my Father more every day: is it the fact that he survived you that makes me mad at him, the fact that he is considering the possibility of surviving me too, and my daughter, with the same lament as he did you, his peer: my main wish is to be survived and buried by those I love best...

All your family medical care was a monument to that idea, to live forever and in control . Your country, now mine, is reigned by people like you who share this goal. I don't hate them even though they ruined my life, because I know them: they are you. I cannot hate you without loving you, because you are me, too: and the more my daughter grows the more I am you with her...

My birthday is approaching: our feast, the day you gave life to me and survived notwithstanding the fact that you faced death as every mother does . My birthday is my daughter's birthday, yours is mine and so on... we mothers of an only child have it that way, especially with a baby girl...But I believe in death, I wouldn't live without my death being certain, but you taught the contrary, that you would never die or let go...

My delivery was my true birth in death and I felt rich, on my own for the first time in my life.

Your delivery of me was painful, dangerous, upside down and you lost control: for the first time in your life. Actually my birth and my delivery were two sides of the same story, your eternity. The one you lived for, the one I shrink from.

My birthday is approaching and I remember with a sharp pain how last year at the time you were still alive making my chocolate cake and thinking of a suitable present for me. This year it will all be different, for me, unbearable without your touch. New rituals, first birthday alone...

I am trying to make a separation between us two; in good in bad, in anything, or if that is not possible, I am ready to merge, to be again flesh of your flesh and disappear. Or maybe it is the opposite now, you are flesh of my flesh now that you have flesh no more...

I fight against intruders, as always, call it other, call it daughter, be it physical, be it psychological.

February 22nd, 2000

I said, today is three months that you are gone, that number will bring me luck, and it did: in small things. In your name I made a cake, the first one in my life. I used to say that I cannot bake cakes because my mother is alive. On your day I baked my first cake because every the 22nd of every month will be your day, at least for some time...I used to feel the same with the date of my daughter's birth...I still do, but other dates have come to crowd my emotional schedule.

February 23, 2000

My mother knew how to knit

to sew

to bake cakes

to sleep soundlessly and without moving

to get out of a matrimonial bed without waking you up

to cook next door without making a sound

to have an asthma attack at dawn in the dining room in the dark, in silence, without drawing attention

in the dark in silence

to wait for me at the window sill late at night without being visible from outside

to read my letters and smell my clothes without letting me know

to kiss me without me noticing it and feeling like a baby

to stay at home with me instead of going out with my father or her girlfriends

to take her hand out of mine whilst I was asleep and go to work

to heal the sick dying children that I hated out of jealousy of them

in other words

my mother was mostly invisible

Now that she is gone she became visible

A void place

I made the cake as she used to

I get out of bed without making a sound

I take care of the family she left behind without a word of complaint

Again a pang at the thought that she is dead: the memory of being at her funeral hit me like bad news.

February 24, 2000

I tried her fur coat on: I poked in her cupboard, took it from where it has been hanging the past ten years since she last wore it and I put it on, free of her will to say yes or no. I nearly tore the sleeve, what a small woman she was. I looked good, I looked as good as she did in it. Again I remembered her wearing it to La Scala in Milan, dressed up as a little lady with diamonds and fur, with Chanel floating over her shining evening dress. Other times, other

styles. I looked good as well with thin figure and long hair but I have no place to go dressed like that. It was her inside me, peeping but through me in the fur coat. In the fur coat tonight was her. I returned it carefully to where I found it. I only said to myself: let's hope nobody steals it.

I remember your story of how you got married. My father came to your father's house. You were only 22. My father was young, clean and not lazy. Your words. He liked you very much, he came to your father with a friend of his because he had heard of you and he was a marrying guy. He heard of a young, pretty hard working girl. His words. You liked him. He asked you out immediately. You turned to him angrily saying: What kind of girl do you think I am, when I find somebody I like I will marry, I will not waste my time. Father said immediately: will you marry me. And immediately you said, yes. Your first date was your marriage: the official story. There is another story to your love life, but I will tell it the next time: it is not related to my father. Now, for your marriage you wanted red boots. You were all poor then, immediately after the war; you were all communists, especially you, out of choice, poor, too by choice. But you were clean and you liked to dress well. My father earned you the red boots and my grandfather, your father, made them for you. Many years later, in Milan I wanted to buy the same red boots I heard so much of. I wore them against the fashion of that time, like magic shoes. To belong to your story, rather than belonging to a big city of fashion.

When you married you thought you had made a mistake. You wanted a divorce during the first two years because my father was unbearable. Wild, demanding, unbending. As he is now becoming with me, day by day. He is losing all of your influence on him: his tenderness is sinking deep beneath his narcissism, his caretaking of me is turning into macho terrorism of the old and ruthless. I am telling you the truth about yourself and what you made of us, that is, a life. Even if invisible, your trace, your shape is ineradicable. You existed and I am here to prove it, not only as a date of birth and death, as a photo or as a fur coat. You existed as an idea that shaped the world, as heat that smoldered an idea from liquid into solid.

February 25th 2000

I was your princess, I couldn't get off my pedestal for years. I couldn't play with other children and get dirty, I couldn't laugh and make faces... and many other things. I couldn't cut my braids ...or wear long stockings, skirts other than kilts... I could go on forever... I was your princess, what a bore, what a constriction, what a torture to be a doll, a zombie...Now, I still am your princess and you know, it feels good, nobody dares interfere with a princess, nobody knows that I never really was a princess, nor felt like one nor wanted to be one. Nobody dares to use bad words in front of me, afraid I will chop off their tongues or heads. You censored not only me but my world. You made my world, Mother, I couldn't smoke or drink or use bad words in front of you, but now that goes for everybody else in front of me. That's lineage, that's Matrimony.

Memories of insignificant things flash all the time whilst I do unimportant things. I toast the bread and I see how in the kitchen you stopped being a lady and became a maid. I hated the most that transformation: why, why that Cinderella living in you as a sickness, as a cancer, as a split personality. Why so much a lady when out in the world and so much a humble maid when at home? Which was actually your safe place? I hated your way of being a woman, the way you served my father and his primitive needs to command and be obeyed by his wife. I knew that you thought that women should pretend to be women while actually free to be something else secretly, that men actually cared only for the performance of the game, but I hated you for hiding the truth for my sake. I was your baby girl, I didn't want your life and you thought that your life was the most one could get, being a woman: a superior/inferior species.

You kept all those lovely clothes in the cupboards and wore rags in your home, the best part of your life.

I feel aggressive moods and vibrations more often when I think of you. Even when I look at my daughter, in many ways so similar to you, I feel angry. I remember how I got angry at you for trying to steal my daughter from me, and I still feel angry when I look at her and see your success in her lady/maid ways. You turned time back for your sake, you were ruthless with me when it came to my daughter and your heir. Matrimony, lineage again.

February 28th, 2000

In the most popular Mexican soap opera, popular all over the world, a mother says to her daughter at her deathbed: we mothers have the privilege to love. The daughter only answers “Mama”, and I cry. And the whole world cries. Me alone in my room with my mama and my memories of her deathbed: the same words, the same movements, me kissing her forehead, she waving me off because she is not tidy. Of course I pretended to be cool and selfish, that was my daughter’s image, and my mama pretended to be witty and never ill, that was her eternal role...

In the Mexican show, they all hold hands and bow to our applause: the curtain is down, Othello hasn’t only strangled Desdemona but knifed Iago to death at the same moment.

Well, in my life, in our lives, it wasn’t so. The curtain hasn’t fallen, I am still on the stage, an everlasting stage of writing and wondering. I do not consider TV novellas kitsch anymore but life in itself.

March 6th, 2000

I am celebrating my birthday after 21 years, because of you. All these years I haven’t done it, again for you and because of you. Every year you behaved as if it were your birthday and I hated you for that: I hated being born, having my birth celebrated, I hated being part of your story and history. But I wasn’t mean, I just wanted my own world, my own life. You never considered that it should be mine, my own life. You would bake me cakes for my birthday, you would buy me presents for my birthday, and I would switch off the phone in order to avoid you. If only I could hear your voice now. But I am hearing it all the time, even now when I am writing about it, when I am baking your cakes and wearing your sweaters that I despised, and inviting all these people to crowd my flat, and my emptiness of you. No use, and yet a big gain for my small life. I don’t care anymore for my writing or travelling, I care for my cakes and pies, flowers and animals will be next, I guess. I am turning into a Karen Blixen, an old witch but without her brilliancy, and into you, an old lady but without your poignancy. I am mild and pale, I have no shadow, my destiny wasn’t that of a mother and a daughter, I should have been a nun, an adventurer, a drug addict...anything but not a mother of a daughter and a daughter to a mother, a caryatid...My

dreams are full of cakes I am baking without eating: I sleep too much and I postpone the day when I will write about you objectively, your love stories, your spy stories, your political life. I can do that for sure, every man can, but the woman in me knows better, wants it different. I don't want your picture without me, not this time. I want to control you, I want you to be mine. I don't want your tiny hand to leave my tiny three year hand old ever again. Finally I possess you.

I was a miracle child to my father, after me he couldn't have any, before he didn't want any. My child was a miracle child to me, she saved my life and I gave her life. You both, Father and Mother, were unexpected miracles to your old parents. Your mother had you at 43 and my father's mother him at 53 while she was gathering tobacco in a field.

March 7th, 2000

I am cooking, I am baking, my legs are aching, my head is spinning, I am afraid I will faint and never recover my senses again. As happened to you a month before you died. You had nausea and dizziness. This morning I woke up at the hour of your death, and then I went on and slept for another 25 minutes and woke again at the hour of my birth. My head was spinning and I felt like vomiting with pangs in my belly that turned into contracting delivery pain. I am ridiculous, I am kitschy, I am stupid and superstitious, but I cannot stop my birth nor my delivery, because I am you and me together, because we are left only with my body. Because you are dead and I am not yet dead so you want to live on through me. I don't want to tell you no, though I wonder where will I live. I need a bigger body not only a bigger flat. I look at my daughter, but off she goes, she doesn't want to share anything, she is smart and quick and she gets asthmatic breathing when I get too close to her. They used to tell me that she had asthma when she was a kid because I, as a mother, didn't have a strong enough aura to protect her. I am afraid it is the contrary, that she couldn't breathe because of my aura.

I am cooking and baking and my legs are aching. Good.

A true story: the day before I was born, March 6th, you took your last exam at the medicine faculty. Anatomy. You were small and I was invisible while you were sitting. The professor asked you to explain infanticide. You did it and then you stood up. He was upset and amazed, he said: so sorry, my college. Never mind, you answered, went home and a few hours later you had me in pain and glory. I jumped out with my feet, ready to run for my life, and you were left asking for a Caesarian section in order to survive our separation, not realizing it was already all over. Before, my presence in your body you would describe simply as a small fish waving her tail , no arms, no legs kicking, no Other. What a surprise it must have been for you to see me.

March 8th

International Women's Day. Sadness, yet a beautiful day. I went to the graveyard with my father to see my mother's grave. He wanted it: their religion, a very strict and stern atheist religion. I know something about their communist religion and love, I am the survivor.. He knelt on his knees and kissed her photo, an extremely ugly but fancy photo. And he started crying, my dear love, my dearest one, what a shame, what a pity. I was embarrassed, ashamed. My big father on his knees in front of my dead , ashes-to-ashes mother. But she was there above us, below us, beyond us. As if she spoke to bring him to his senses and to drive away my anger and shame... a very young retarded cemetery hobo passed by and gave us such a look of empathy that my father stood up and gave him some money, a lot of money. The boy didn't want to take it, he said, I am only nineteen...he seemed even more retarded when he spoke. I took my father by his arm and said off we go. Don't worry, it is always easier for the one who goes first, pain causes pain, there is no love without pain...and many other sayings that usually work with him. Actually with him only sayings work, never deeds, but I purposely never give them to him, only deeds. And he never notices that. He never wanted to live with me , during her life or now that she is gone. If she had survived him, she would have lived with me, definitely. Even against my will, she would have loved me until the very end, as he doesn't want to, committed only to one woman in his life. And that was my mother. Our bond, our tie, that body that from a cell made a person, that random artist... You are utterly helpless when dying, I saw that with her, but you are also utterly helpless when loving, I see that now with him. Finally I understand what is happening to me when I am helpless...

I didn't attend the Women in Black meeting, worn out by my private emotions. Last night I celebrated my birthday by giving a huge party and cooking for everybody.

March 12th, 2000

My mother died on the same date that Kennedy was shot, 36 years earlier. I remember that day in Cairo, how my parents took it as a personal tragedy. Me too, very young and very political. I wanted to kill his enemies and avenge him. Now my mother was killed, as was President Kennedy, by the bad guys, or just the historical consequence of her own deeds, depending on how you judge death as personal or collective moment of life. Dates are very strange dice, there is some rule to them unknown to us gamblers. Think of how every year we live through the date of our own death, unbeknownst of it as well as the date of our birth which we celebrate. My mother crying over Kennedy was mourning her own death.

March 14th, 2000

Budapest airport

My father said yesterday: I will live on, I survived the depression. Maybe I will remarry. Well, for me another mission, an archetypal one, is over: such missions you don't choose but rather come to you like delivery pressure. Now I am free to go, to disappear. The world can go on without me, without her, without my cousin who died of AIDS. Somehow the world has a perfect new shape, color and sound. We are just witnesses from a beautiful corrupt world that used to be compared to this new perfect world, shaped to fit the present exactly. But a new world it is. I may survive too, if only I want. I am fighting to find a cause, but without you, Mother, there isn't a natural cause for living. No love, no endless sharing, only undemanding freedom. Some cultures, especially modern ones do everything to destroy that kind of love and construct instead a solid economic and rational way of loving, living, giving. Those cultures destroy Matrimony in the name of Patrimony, bondage in the name of material possession. I know what I am writing, what I am defending, so tenderly and blindly: a She against a He.

Milan , day 1

A city of my depression, of your depression, a monument of depression. I went out of the hotel and walked two blocks : it hasn't changed a bit, time has no impact on Milan's depression. I saw the road where we lived and our house. Again I didn't feel anything. As if I had never lived there. Here life isn't bearable, I see you in the misty air, in the depressed faces, in the rude Arabs and fancy prostitutes...

Milan 16th March

Now Mother, I've been looking for you in the streets of Milan, where you used live. The shop windows with very small Italian shoes you used to adore. You got shoes for free, since your feet were so small that only models of shoes were made that small. And you actually never wore them, you kept them as beautiful toys on the shelf, on display. I still have them, I still look at them, nobody can wear them, Cinderella shoes, nobody can turn into my mother by putting them on. You were beautiful and tiny: I saw a woman in the airplane that could have been you, she was as beautiful and looked similar, but when she stood up, I saw she was a fake: not as tiny. I stood close to her longingly, searching for a trace of your perfume. But I left her disappointed and lonelier than before seeing her. Milan, our city where we were living together for the last time, where our shadows live. There is no such thing as forever. I am alone, this is a new world, very much like the old one except that we are not in it anymore. Some other people are living in it, doing the things we used to do, sometimes even better but never as we used to do them.

March 18th

Oh yes, I understand some things now Mother. I could have made it in Italy, in Milan, anywhere: I should have done it, had it not have been for you. Your fear of my inadequacy was greater than my father's veto. You wanted me, Mother, a Wild woman and a Wild Serb in war. I see Milan with different eyes, without your rosy glasses, it is all so banal, so

simple here. All those people and customs you made me fear are actually part of me. As in those wars when the winning army would conquer the entire population by abducting the children and converting them: the Turks did it to the Serbs for five hundred years, globalization and the colonialization made me an Italian and you paid for that.

The art of shopping in this big city of specialized goods: goods you need, goods you need less, goods you do not need at all. It wasn't spending money for you, or loneliness, as for other middle aged women , deprived of a career. No, it was like knitting or gardening, that you loved and did so well. You walked through the lonely streets of Milan with very little or a lot of money (you never counted zeros) and you decorated our lives (our home and our bodies) with your love of beauty and proportion. As a gardener. And like many other intimate trades, you didn't pass this skill on to me. But as I learned to bake a cake for my birthday, today I learned to shop by myself for my family in your streets. I even bought an apron: useless without your warm/sweet/milky adorable body to cling to.

March 19th, 2000

In Milan I wake up every morning at 7a.m. I am tired but there is no sleep for my unclean conscience. Why are we restless, me and my conscience? Because I am a bad Serb here, because my family is on its own back there in Serbia. Do I wake at seven in the morning because you used to wake me then with warm tea and a whisper, to send me to school. This morning I heard your whispering voice, it was as clear as ice but I wasn't asleep. It is Sunday today, the day I was born the day you nearly died. But Mother, let go of me, I did you when you asked five minutes of heaven. I just want to sleep an hour longer in my bed.

March 19th, 2000

My last day in Milan: never again shall I walk down the streets of Milan holding hands with my dead mother. Next time I come, be it in only one week, I will be alone and free.

Now let me make a list of what she used to do. A insider's list of a Foreigner, of an Outcast, of the Other, of a Serb, of a Complex of Inferiority , of Serbian Nationalist Superiority, of a Stalinist, of a fake Italian, of a never integrated , invisible woman...

- 1) My mother used to walk down the Montenapoleone Street in her tiny chic shoes and pretend she were Italian. If somebody needed to know the way, they would ask her, she pretended so well.
- 2) She used to eat ice-cream in Corso Vittorio Emmanule, notwithstanding her diet: the ice cream she asked at her deathbed and a lemon cake, nobody had heard of, so we guessed it came from her early childhood. We decided to pretend we knew what she was talking about since her death came also as her an inability to eat but only dream of food.
- 3) She used to travel all the time on foot because she was obsessed with bacteria and viruses and dirty hands. As a doctor and as a Lady Macbeth. I guess she was something in between.
- 4) My mother while doing all this loved me all the time. She said to an Italian friend of mine some years ago, which my Italian friend reported to me after she died: I didn't want to waste my time in Italy. I didn't socialize, all my time I dedicated to my daughter. Well, she had all the time in the world, and I, her daughter, hardly had any and was rarely about. The truth being that she was alone and lonely as a dog. She belonged to a culture and a beauty nobody knew of or cared to know. She had a daughter who was a foreigner to her in a foreign country. More than a Medea, a vase empty of herself but stuffed with foreign languages, she was a Penelope, a woman neglected for thirty years: a proud woman too, too proud to acknowledge her neglect. A crazy and demanding woman also but who kept quiet. Contradiction? Well, that was my mother as I saw it. Unhappy? I will never know that. My father who gave us that life told us we were very lucky to have it. All I know is that I took her to the cinema, to la Scala to make her less lonely, to cafes to drink Italian coffee, and now that it is all over.

I am listening to your music here in Italy, in Milan: che musica terribile and yet tears are blurring my words...

March 20th, 2000

The time we were on the Milan-Lugano train , as I am now back in 1982, with Father dying in the hospital and you crying in front of me: he is dying, okay I said, you have me. You knew you did and you stopped crying. I said to myself in panic, Good Lord, I will have to be a husband now, not only a daughter. We climbed off the train at Lugano to buy medicine for the dying Father in Milan. At the border, the policeman asks for our passports: you haven't yours on you. They start screaming, you start crying again. I am nearly breaking down, with them, with you, with me, with the dying father who permits himself to die without reminding us that we needed a passport on the border. But I made a promise that I will be your husband, that holds even before my father dies. So I stand up and say: let us go, my father is dying, we need the medicine. I am not crying , I am screaming and looking sternly at them. After all they are only men, vulnerable and Italian. And they let us go. I feel new and important while you are drying your eyes with a silk handkerchief, you never forgot that. I look at you sternly and say: next time your bring your passport with you . Then I think of my dying father who gave us instructions all our lives but not those meant for men or in case he didn't survive. Will we be able to make it alone?

Another time in a train: You were seeing your friend off at the railway station. We got on the train and the two of you kept talking. I tried to divert your attention, but no way. You didn't have many friends, whether because you didn't have time , or not wanting or needing them, or be wary of people. But this woman wanted you and you couldn't say "no" to that kind of demand. (Now when I think of you, there was always as a shell around you, an aura, you were always protected if by nothing other than your illusions).

So you despised this woman for wanting to be with you but you accepted her as family, for the same reason. Without despising all those who loved you, me included, you couldn't accept them (it took me years to get rid of that script). And that woman, when you died, phoned me and said: now you haven't got a mother anymore. And she started sobbing. I never understood that.

Well when we were seeing her off in Milan, 30 years ago, we didn't get off the train in time. We had to travel to the first station, to Brescia. At first you laughed, then you got angry with her: you were in your nightgown underneath your coat. You were embarrassed.

Mother, I said, we will do some shopping in Brescia. It was a windy cold winter day. You loved to shop. It made you feel like somebody else, a queen. So even in Brescia, a small provincial town you managed to buy your queen's clothing and back we came to Milan all new. My father laughed at us scornfully (actually you both scorned each other publicly, I was different, always amazed at your rudeness). He never realized what an adventure and a sacrifice it was for you to get out of your home, to get on a train, to travel all over the world. And all this because of and for him. He wasn't stupid, just selfish, in a way that men are. You weren't crazy or anything, just my little mother from a little village of old-fashioned, rich Serbia.

Lugano, March 21st, 2000

In Lugano, where you used to come with my father and me, a bored but quiet kid, eating chocolate out of despair. Getting stuffed and vomiting on the way back home. You never allowed me any of those psychological diagnoses, adolescence, neurosis, depression... not to me or to yourself... I was depressed, stuffed. I didn't know what you were doing, stiff in your Swiss suits: the only fashion you followed from youth until old age. A cannon of elegance and beauty which defied change, sex. That was you all right, defying everything alive or changeable though you loved flowers like all dictators. Stiff in your bosom, big and square under your checked jacket, you smuggled money for the Yugoslav government, instead of for my father. Everybody did it, it was the rule of the game to make money but nobody used a bosom of a small woman as a vehicle. My father's business made its fortune on your bosom. Me too as a baby, the motherland. You had a lot of milk but very small nipples. Is it possible that I remember my struggle to get milk out of them? You fed a baby and a country, and you died with a few pairs of luxurious shoes as your fortune; you never had a Swiss bank account, or any account at all. You didn't understand or need money. You had a rich father first then a rich husband. I do envy your life sometimes, you didn't have to be a feminist, you had it all.

But I am your heir, at least of your ideas which were too big for money to buy. Yes, that megalomania is also my inheritance, my Matrimony.

March 25th

Fear around me, and without you Mother nobody is telling political lies, and touching my body, my forehead, fearing only illness. Nobody can calm me. Men want me to calm them, only a woman can see something different from their political horror based on their personal fear. You gave me life because you thought the world was a safe place and you never missed a day to repeat that. I was against you and your men, our men, all men. I thought you were stupid and a liar, but now I have to be stupid and a liar as you were. Why did I leave you all alone to bear the world? Maybe, if I had helped you, you would have lived longer. I made you miserable. You who didn't have any other choice but to love me.

March 29th, 2000

If I make a salad I remember how you used to make it: I guess I must get used to life as a process of forgetting my mother. I dream of my father dead and my mother being alive: if I could only switch them for a while and then switch back again, so I could have them both dead or both alive, but not at the same time.

I put on your spring jacket, Mother, the one I bought for you in Milan when you stopped travelling. Only for you would I buy expensive and ladylike clothes, for everybody else I would be reasonable. Not for you. They meant something special to you that I never understood and that you didn't try to explain. An understatement. Well this jacket had your dirty handkerchief in the pocket. What an emotion: your body, your fluids were in that handkerchief, now that your body is no more much less to produce anything. Once it produced me.

Every one of your handbags that I opened had a pair of gloves, a handkerchief and a mirror. My friend says, the same with her dead mother.

April 2nd, 2000

I am ill for the first time without you, and I am completely alone. My family asks me, how do you feel, but it is a polite and distant question. I just sleep and you never leave me, as if you are holding me tight.

April 3rd

Now that I am sick I know how she felt being sick for the past ten years and craving to be useful in any way. Why didn't I know it before? I did give her things to do and then I would forget to pick them up or just say something wrong. All the people around me are pointing out my uselessness, sick and old people are a nuisance... I always wanted to help and to feel solidarity, but this men's world made me act the way I did : I do wish she understood it.

Her world was falling apart, her political world with Milosevic and her intimate world with me, no wonder she closed her eyes seeking five minutes of paradise. At least she chose her own time.

April 4th, 2000

I didn't sleep last night, I was choking, my throat ached, and I went to the armchair in the living room and rocked in it until dawn. I dozed off at a certain point and started thinking of you: all those nights we spent sleepless, when I was sick, when my daughter was sick. I never really asked you to be with me, but I never managed to send you off. It felt even worse with you, or at least that is how I thought at the time. But then one night, one of the very few that you were not around when I was in trouble, I remember I panicked. My daughter was sick and choking. Together we would laugh at dawn, tired and worn out with victory over the night and illness. I would go to bed then but not you, you would go prepare morning coffee, see my father off, go to work, wash the diapers, whatever...I remember you happy and light, never worn out, your mission in life was fulfilled: to give life and to take care of it. After all you were a pediatrician, a doctor...Yes, I felt like an invalid without you because you made me one, and that wasn't fair, but it wasn't only that; it was company and love we shared , and I miss that part these days when I am alone, when I am sick or when somebody else is sick.

I remember when you would wake very early in the morning as soon as you heard me moving with the baby: it was during holidays we spent together. I did appreciate that, I counted on it, I was afraid of staying alone with a small baby. Who cares if you made me an invalid, we had a wonderful time together at dawn, at dusk, when other people were free to lead a free life...

But I remember Mother one time in Milan when I woke up in a panic at dawn. In our huge flat, your rooms were on the other side of mine. I ran to them, to look for you, I thought I had a nightmare, but you weren't there. Then on tiptoe I went to the living room to hear a very strange sound from the armchair: sobbing, choking, breathing, all at once. It was you Mother, having one of your first asthma attacks. You never wanted to share them with us, or with me. You suffered in silence, as I did last night, on the same armchair. A strange thing, parents' love, it never pays back to the parents is repaid on to one's children. I will share those moments I had with you as a daughter as a mother to my daughter. But I wanted to share them with you, as a mother, I wished that one day you will be my daughter and I your mother.

Your little body in the green armchair shivered and choked that night in Milan. I saw you from behind, you knew I was there but I left in utmost silence pretending I didn't see anything. You couldn't speak and you didn't even have to wave your hand in dismissal; I obeyed your silent orders. And never after did we mention the episode.

April 9th, 2000

I want to tell your love story all the time, the love story of your youth, that I do not know how. I do not dare to make it profane, banal or mine, I also have a mysterious feeling concerning your love story, I am afraid of discovering something behind it I already know but do not want to know. Your love story hurt not only you but my father and me. It doesn't belong to us, maybe your granddaughter would understand it better...not us, the two cloned monkeys, sheep...

I miss you I miss you I miss you, in all those ways I described above, I have no more means to tell you how much I miss you. What am I a writer for if I just cry instead of writing and bringing you back to me?

April 11th 2000

I dream of you in various ways, last night, for example, I dreamt that you were a dog, and that you came back to help me with a huge party I was organizing for my friends in a loft. Now, why were you the dog, because you kept close to me? I felt your love and breath and I felt at ease. And then, my dreams started turning into a nightmare, I was actually supposed to work as a Cinderella and take care of a cruel rich dying woman. Then you turned from a dog back to your old shape and said, now this is only a dream, but not even in your dreams will you serve anybody except the ones you love. So I said “no” to the old woman, I woke up shivering and sweating and you were no longer there. Somebody told me that people who love you never leave you and come back in various shapes to protect you or they send you somebody else to do so.

I keep remembering the most nonsensical episodes from our common life, I am ashamed to write them; intimacy is like a shadow, the moment you cast light on it, it disappears.

April 12, 2000

A clear thought/image cuts through my mind. An afternoon, cold and sunny like today: many years ago in the same city, Belgrade. But some other time, oh yes definitely. Maybe some other people were unhappy, but not us.

As I read in bed I feel you gaze on me from the bed opposite to mine. Your gaze is of wonder: intent and penetrating. I turn into stone, unable to breathe, let alone read, afraid to make a wrong move to disappoint you, alert you. But you are gazing in wonder at your baby who has grown up into a person. And you are trying to penetrate that little self to find out who she is. You love that little self but you also want to possess and control it. I remember how often I had to repulse you, fighting for my life, winning it back to my little self. I remembered this because I gazed at my baby studying, in love and wonder. She reacts immediately at my gaze, comes to me and gives me a big kiss but says sternly: why

are you looking at me? I tell her immediately the truth. I will never permit our love to turn into something else, as ours did, Mother.

April 13th, 2000

Well, we are both, my father and I, your two clones, eating the food you liked, that we never liked when you were urging us to eat, as a woman, who cooks, as a doctor. It is beans and our stomach needs beans; it needs your beans instead of your kisses and reprimanding. How we both miss your reprimanding, my father is going wild. You cannot grow without somebody taking on the role of the bad guy, usually it is the mother, the wife the woman. Well, you took it, proudly, as any witch would.

When I was born my father said: how can a man as big as I am have a daughter, people will laugh at me. When I was pregnant I was sure it would be a boy because I couldn't imagine a woman like me having a girl. When my baby girl was born, I felt relieved, as my father is only now, when you are gone Mother, only after all these years is he relieved with me being a woman, a woman as you were. Only now he realizes how happy he was to have a baby girl instead of a boy, like himself... We are clones, I know that, but he doesn't because we are of different sex...

April 18th, 2000

I just threw away the bottle of deodorant that you kept ever since 1984 for "your trips". An expensive perfumed deodorant. On your deathbed, you glanced at me taking it out of your cupboard, hidden between the nightgowns, you could hardly keep your eyes open but you said: I am keeping it for my trips...Mother you haven't made a trip for the past five years, I said cruelly, you haven't left your house for the past three years. I went on, and then I didn't say: you haven't left your bed for the past thirty days...I understood what you were telling me: I want to live, you said in you sweet, unintrusive way...And I answered you in my cruel loving style, you won't live this time...As usual I was right.

Mother, without you I am coping with cruelty of men ; men and children, they are using me, eating me, my energy, my love, my mind, but I am becoming tougher and tougher. I only wonder, will I stop loving them one day? Without you to remind me how to love and give , never demand but only give. Is it something one can never forget having once learned it, like swimming, like kissing...

I was as cruel toward you as life is. You loved your mother with cruelty, your mother did the same to your grandmother and so on: women practice a special misogyny only women can see.

April 19th, 2000

This morning I woke up with blood in my right eye. I looked at myself in the mirror and I thought it was you. I saw you often with blood in your eyes, saying never mind, it is nothing: a woman losing her eyesight, then the use of her limbs, then her breath, but still in power with high spirits...

You are the vehicle of my writing, the vehicle of my living, of the truth and lies and secrets we never shared but both knew in isolation. In your name I can say everything I want, you are not here to defend your truth, but you would be proud of me and my lies about you. They sound so different from your truth, sometimes even better. So, if I managed to wear your tiny shoes into the street the day you died, I will make you fit into my large picture of you. No more boundaries between us. Maybe the ones we had were not true boundaries after all. I decided to survive with my and your men and not abandon them, but also not to get sick and die as you did. I decided to win: you and your death are my strongest allies.

April 20th, 2000

An abandoned dog barking his head off under my window where I work; a rude neighbor phoning me with hostility; my car breaking down, bad weather...If you were alive I would get angry at you. But I am dealing with the grown up world as a grown up. Impotence and rage must be channeled to the right place.

April 21st, 2000

I am moving my winter clothes to the upper shelves and the summer things to the lower: the first summer without you will come. I will give away some of your knitting and behave as if I am not giving away parts of your body. Your body was burnt and it is now everywhere. And I am free to give away the old sweaters you knitted now that you are not here do to remake them, like the life cycle. You knitted with wool and cotton. I will let myself cry and watch the old sweaters go at a funeral. You cannot avoid crying when burying the dead nor and hoping that new life will come out of the dust.

I am thinking of building a house, to make up for your loss with a creation. Once, I thought of having children every time you were near dying or when somebody died. I didn't do it and even if I had, I would have the same urge now that you have gone to do it again. That is why I want to build a house for the children I already have, from the earth to the sky.

April 22, 2000

My red eye, until this morning was, in my mind, the consequence of a stroke, the one that you had. Last night was the climax, but this morning I woke up recovering: it wasn't fatal, I am not you, and my daughter will not be an orphan as I am. I even calculated that it would have been easier for her to be motherless at 16, as my she is today than at 46 as I am. If only you had died when I was sixteen...I would have had a free life. Dying so late without letting go of me, you made me live on for you, wear your clothes, bake your cakes. I am not saying one option is better than the other, not longer have I an opinion as to good or bad.

April 23, 2000

I reread for the first time since you died my private letters to friends abroad who asked about your health while you were in the hospital. Wasn't I strong, my words were so clear and strong, I wonder what my emotions were, was I as shattered as I am now, or did I break after you died? I hardly dared read those words when you still were alive, during your last hours, when it could have yet made a difference, when you spoke to me, when your voice was in my phone whenever I wanted it. That was exactly the most important thing about you: you were always there when I wanted you, day or night, to speak to you or to ignore you ...But then I went on bravely reading my cruel clear words seeing your death ahead of time, counting the hours. Those rituals I once called insanity now are my daily bread. I don't use the cemetery or candles or prayers, I use words, dreams and thoughts...Last night I dreamt of my childhood summer house, with you and many other dead people who were my world, my first love, my cosmos. I was there with my present family and it was idyllic. I even answered my daughter from my light sleep integrating the present into my dream. I guess I am lucky I have a safe place in my past that I can always go back to. And that safe place is you.

We are changing together, me and you and I am glad things are moving on, I could hardly survive the status quo with your beautiful clothes staying in the cupboards forever. Your flat is still only yours. Father chose to take a new daughter instead of a new wife . He is telling me sad stories about his childhood that he says he never told you, in order not to hurt you...I am his new wife as in Egypt daughters were to their fathers, kings, widowers. In the name of your law and your invisible reign, Matrimony.

I wanted to wash my hair in your flat, but I couldn't, there were no products for washing a female hair.

I went to your room, looked at your bed where I saw you last alive, and I was tempted to lie on the same spot in the cradle of your soul. I didn't, I said to myself, it is too early, though I will do it one of these days. Then I remembered how strict and harsh you always were toward me in that room: I could touch nothing, I couldn't move an object, I was just a flower in your vase. You were a dictator, Mother, and you ruled. Especially in that room, where you would scream at me because I was a poor mother to my baby. Why then do I miss you so?

April 24 2000

Without you around, the emotions protecting my wild and crazy mind and actions have nearly melted. Growing up? My chaotic despair always defeated your dogmatic optimism...

April 25, 2000

I am watching a film, two sisters reunited after a 20 year estrangement: they have time to make up before one of them dies. I didn't have enough time with my cousin, I just saw her once and she was gone in a few days. ...I thought of you and how we did make it, somehow.

April 28, 2000

Mother, you are taking my writing from me, if I do not write about you I cannot write or think about anything else. If I try, you appear. Now that you are gone I have complete freedom of writing, you are my best topic, dead heroes cannot complain. You or nothing. I always knew that being absolutely free meant the contrary.

Every single situation we have gone through in this year since you left, is different in my writing. I am living in a new country, in exile, trying to get used to unknown rules and avoid being kicked out of the civilized world of women. I am taking my daughter to the doctor today and am shaking as if she might die. I am saying to myself, okay if something happens to her, I will die too. But why all this death talk. After all it is you who died Mother as an old sick woman... leaving us with your little girl fears.

April 30th, 2000

Am I not tough? I even made the Russian salad today without crying, the first one in my life, but it tasted like yours. I had only my tongue and my distorted memory as a reference point. I never bothered to listen or watch you while you made it. I scorned your small talk and questions: do you want it with eggs, or with cream, or both? Now, as in a trance, I remembered these big you had dilemmas. I tried asking my family: they scorned me exactly as I did you. When after three hours of sweating and running to the shop, the taste came out as usual, as out of your hand, I wanted appreciation. The family said, why shouldn't it be the same...you stupid woman...I felt like the boy from *Andrei Rubliev* film who made the bell according to the secret formula of his father's, the famous bell maker who had died. The problem we shared that nobody could understand was that we didn't know the formula, we just guessed it. The boy risked his life doing it while I just played a role. You know what Mother, I do not want to be you, I do not want to be you with my family as you were with me: somebody who is doing everything and is scorned in return...who is taken for granted, criticized, treated harshly, ignored, neglected...and still happy...No, I made this salad, to get rid of you. I am trying your life in order to understand you, I am letting you live in my life, in my body. Maybe at the end of this symbiotic good-bye I will say good-bye to myself and become you.

May 3rd, 2000

Things you have done badly, things you didn't know how to do, and those you harassed me with... those things I miss in this hotel on the lake where they happened. You were obsessed with behaving properly in a hotel, as a waxen doll, as a ridiculous queen, as a dictator out of time...You would oblige me to be your doll, to dress and move next to you as you imagined a queen's baby would in your fantasy of a proper world. You would pinch me behind my ear if I misbehaved, if my dress got dirty, if I laughed inappropriately... I am here now, alone. far from your world of ridiculous manners...I remember your proud face as I refused to obey you, the same face of death I am wearing now, beautiful, calm

and indifferent, as if death has already come. You knew then as I do now, that our loved ones will deny us one day. I am disappearing now Mother, here in the sun at this beautiful lake, I have gone bad and people are leaving me as I left you. Probably that was what happened to you. There was no tender woman around who loved you and who would help you out with the big world of duties of a mother and wife. Your mistake is now my mistake, but doubled by me making it again.

In high heels, a restrained voice and wearing gloves to avoid the anonymous dirt of unknown people who slept in the same hotel room, you taught me how to lie, hide and be a fascist while weak. You taught me how to lose but stay a lady when I could risk that but win. I left you, hoping for a better life...sorry you are not around to see how I failed. I miss your sour, bitter commentary, on people, on love... Oh you were wrong, you were cruel. There is no such thing as being wrong or right, even cruel, even bad: the only thing that matters is the fact that by doing it you loved me.

We are living together these days, inventing Matrimony day by day, discovering the hidden roles, models, of a mother/daughter love... You entered me, and you are me now. I see through your eyes every single thing like an obsessed dog. I fight to preserve my eyes too, to have two pairs, four singles, at the cost of fighting each other on what they see, and it is fun, Mother, I must tell you that it is also fun when your mother dies. The two things I never knew before about what happens when your mother dies are: you discover your mother was bad and that it doesn't matter and that it can also be fun wearing somebody else's body, and clothes. Some daughters wear their mother inside and some outside. I guess I wear mine outside, as I used to when I was a baby. Isn't that fun, Mother, to be back in your tummy and finally be my own mother and a baby. The dream of every baby comes true this way. Does that mean that we wish our mother dead all the time, Freud said that but he never said it was fun, being a man, so important and tragic about duties and power. I guess we construct our mother's death in order to invent and postpone and control our own. What binds me to my father is not his blood, not his money nor Patrimony nor name, but the fact that we were loved by the same woman in the same identical way which makes us both widowers and loveless... Matrimony. Father was in her body and me, too, she gave us love like water and we taught her to grow bad in order to stay alive with us. It was you Mother, who constructed your death. Oh, how you laughed at Father for not

daring to enter your death room and look straight into your eyes and say good-bye... and how proud you were of me sitting by you and holding your devastated hand, Matrimony triumphed over Patrimony. You knew that I would let you in me again, and that then it would be forever. You died in peace and with an ironic smile on your face... I did let you go, I made you go, but not before letting you enter me. And we had fun, you dying and me not.

May 8th 2000

I killed you. I knew it all the time though I used to say: I let you go. In truth, I was sloppy, I was lazy, subconsciously I was a murderer... My father went to the hospital and was given the official version from the secret files. By a friend. You died of hospital neglect, of our neglect, of we who let you go to the hospital against your wish, because you knew , being a doctor what would happen. I said no, you will not go, but then, I didn't have the courage to enforce my will, against the wish of two men, my father and your husband, and your brother doctor and my uncle. They didn't want to take the responsibility of your struggle for life at home. I did, you were too sick to complain, and I alone was too weak to win. So I just let you go. And not only that, I let them hurt you, I turned over all the responsibility, knowing that they wouldn't accept and I left. I left the country, following my career. I did phone and tell the men with responsibilities how to cure you, but I knew very well, that without me around it was Russian roulette. I left your precious little life in the hands of men who make wars and a lottery that always wins...eventually, as death does...I feel so guilty that finally after all these months I do not feel the pain: the lie has faded, my responsibility is now clear and my pain will be healed by a just punishment: a life sentence ...

Many other things happened before your death according to the same pattern of male weakness and neglect: the deaths of my unborn children, death of my parrot, death of my happiness, death of my choices.... I was angry with you for your weakness and for your collusion with men's will and neglect. In your death I was torn between your pattern that I knew was wrong and my pattern that I knew was right but which you never accepted. And then I let go of your hand. It was a murder out of revenge, not a cold-blooded one. Shame

on me, a feminist, a pacifist, a mother, a writer, a criminal...who didn't know as simple thing as to love and protect her own mother.

All big love stories are killed by small neglect, I also let my cousin go when she started getting in my way...she was stubborn, she was self-destructive. What about you, Mother? You were all wrong, no doubt of that...But what about me, mother, I who was all right?

You also got in my way, being sick all the time, being stubborn, being strong, wanting to live and command...Don't we all do that all the time?

Once, in primitive times and places children used to take their old parents to the woods and kill them according to rituals, dictated by local culture. Here, in our tribal villages, a loaf of bread was put on the top of the head and the head and loaf would be chopped off with an axe. In a my city tribe, I it happened slowly, you just got on my nerves day by day, more and more. You got on my nerves and in my way because of all the new things you were doing to me in the name of your age and illness. I remember buying you cream, while you were dying abandoned. Only a cream? Nothing else? I said to myself , I am treating her as if she were dead.

Oh, yes, what a fine crime, a cunning one it was: not even you knew I was killing you. You thought I really couldn't stop them from taking you to the hospital and forgetting you there...Only I know better; my crime is so common, perfect and true that nobody will ever dare convict me. My tragedy is that notwithstanding this confession I will not be brought to trial or punished.

My head is spinning from the awareness of being a murderer living freely among other guilty people...I am not used to this role. I wanted to write about you and music, but short pangs came from nowhere, of me living in exile since you are gone, of you being gone gone gone...and I wanted time to heal my words and cover them with other words, I wanted to start anew and have more loves and lives and I thought, yes if it can happen to others, it will be granted to me too.... But here I am, a cold-blooded matricide writing a confession with facts hanging over my head like axes. No beauty, no love, just an ordinary crime story.

My father is crying. He came with his cane to my flat, without calling, timidly ringing at the back door. I thought it was some beggar when I looked through the peephole. He climbed the two flights breathing heavily through tears. I put on my raincoat over my night gown in order to open the door, I never refuse beggars, out of superstition. And there he was, in his raincoat, a criminal, as I was, in mine. We sat on small stools in the service room and we cried out of impotence and guilt.

If you only had survived your death, looking at us, now you would just say: you deserve it. Even dead, you said it.

I knew everything about loss and death except for this detail when it comes to murders they are simpler

My father gave me a piece of paper he brought that day from the hospital: he went there to get the official documents of your death and by mistake he was given the true ones, previously kept away from both of us. It said: general blood infection, late therapy of antibiotics, no effect of therapy, release home, no further prognosis.

My mother was murdered: by international sanctions that prevented hospitals from having enough antibiotics ; by hospital neglect; by us two who knew what could happen and yet let it happen. And finally by her own hand who knew even better than we what was going on in her country, in her home, in her body and never admitted the truth. Let's look for the murderer: he is not wearing a raincoat, he doesn't even have a face.

May 10, 2000

I went to a party last night, the birthday of an old friend. A family gathering in the garden with a barbecue, oh how stupid and nice it was. And there were all those ladies, old mothers and grandmothers, all dressed up, funny, ridiculous, nice or nasty, out of time, but ruling time...I was so glad they were all there, lively, cooking, serving me, asking about my health, my family, remembering me when I was young...I was feeling calm and happy, life is eternal, life as in books, it changes in small ways but goes on naturally as in a long novel. But all of a sudden lightening streamed over the starry sky, a storm started to blur

our simple joy...and it was just what I needed to make me start crying and remembering my story: this was not my party, these were not my old ladies...these nice boring children were not mine...My ladies were all gone, before their time, with bitterness and pain, as victims of this world where only the boring and dull survive...Not our kind, Mother...I became nasty, envious, angry at their family bliss...My stomach started to ache, I pretended those ladies were my ladies, and they pretended to be mine.

I know how mothers work, I remember how you always loved me best among all the children and how you managed to hide it perfectly as a doctor of children, as a true lady. Why did you have to go, why didn't we ever make this party, so dull and stupid, why do I always have to cling to other families like an emotional beggar when it comes to my dull and stupid needs. Last year you did make a party for your 50th wedding anniversary: it was dull and stupid enough, maybe we never had as close to a true family gathering as last year. And I sat next to you and harassed you, I boycotted the dullness and stupidity of a family gathering: that wasn't your style, you taught me better than that and I just went on and on and on... You tried to avoid my eyes, my words, you felt uneasy and guilty in front of all the guests...but you knew too well it was your role I was playing, the cynical and sharp baby you always wanted...But you were too old and weak, grown sentimental because of the imminent death you rightly feared. So you turned to me tenderly, as you always would when I got too nasty, and said: why are you fighting me all the time. Mother, how I hated you, I wanted to kill you, oh how many times I only dreamt of killing you and woke in a sweat after the murder, happy that it was only a nasty dream, that I was a good daughter after all, and not a killer... How I hated you when you said that in front of everyone, I hated your stupidity, your conforming with the rules, your abandoning of my education...And I felt deeply sorry for you...Guilty and sorry: that feeling never faded, not yet today...I always ran away from my own to the other... I always mistreated my own kin in the name of the Other...and I always came back feeling guilty and sorry...You of anyone should know that.

May 11th, 2000

The hole in my stomach will never heal.

I appreciate people I love or maybe loved for the sheer fact that they are alive: they carry a body around, they have substance, an aura... Their sound and breath I cherish...

May 12th, 2000

I am ashamed of living, and that I will die eventually when I think of my body as a garbage to be disposed of. Who will do that if you are not around mother, you always used to take care of me and my garbage, of my milk and shit, of my vomit and tears... I took care of yours, there was still hope that you would survive me and comfort me so I did it, unwillingly but diligently. Then you betrayed me to death, with a cunning smile. My father got himself two women to take care of him, but I... what can I do being a woman... taking care of men and children and having been taken care of by only one woman, whom naturally one detests and who usually abandons one to death. I have to get tough and grow accustomed to being abandoned and not taken care of. It is only six months now that you are gone. You died, and the world didn't crumble because of it.

My friends tell me to cry out bitterly about your death. So I did today, I cried my guts out in my dark bedroom, with closed shutters and stale air. Then while screaming with pain over the image of you dying, I started also to vomit, just as you did. Only one phrase echoed: She died in devastating pain...

I nearly died your death today, I wanted to taste your hell in my body... When somebody patted me on my head to stop my crying, when somebody ran their fingers through my hair to stop the fit, I knew it was my fingers running through your hair when you were suffering... It was more than a good-bye kiss, it was a healing.

May 16th, 2000

Beautiful days, but you wouldn't have enjoyed them, you never liked spring because you were allergic to new lives and pollen and flowers and all the things you loved best ... What a fate, what you love destroys you and vice versa; I remember the flowers you kept in your home, the love you invested in them and how they would just wither... Then you would say

to me, take them to your place and I would answer, but I hate taking care of flowers, I do not like them, I do not like nature at all...And you would say, please, with that very tiny voice of a small, weak, sick woman pretending to be strong and tall and cruel...Love is blind you would say, flowers just love you...

Yes, love is blind, I always knew that even before taking care of the flowers I didn't love but grew for me, free and wild, harassing me...If it weren't blind it would not be love, I guess...

You come these days by night to haunt me, Mother. You are alive, you are dead, you are dying...in all shapes, but you are with me, talking to me, confusing me: who is dead I wonder in my sleep, you or me...My dream always involves water when you come to me. Usually it is Venice, in a boat, neither of us ever liked Venice though we spent many days there. I think our boat is Dante's ferry as Venice is a place of death.

You come in my dreams Mother, and I cannot refuse you, it is our only meeting place...

My pain is so physical when I think of you dead and gone that I wonder what my future will be if this cancer in me grows. Why does it happen, shouldn't time heal? I have my life, my loves, my children, my passions...why all this? I left you years ago in order to avoid this... What is punishing me... Blind love? Arrogance?

May 17th, 2000

Please Mother, just this little thing before I leave. I am in a hurry, my pain is long, endless, but my time to express it is short because of my survival duties...During the nights I suffer memories and then when I wake up, they are all gone: a woman had a mother who died, that is the story.

Now, for today, just this small penitence: I made alliances against you all the time, with stronger and wilder than you were, just to defeat you and humiliate you, not bothering if you were right only wanting to beat you. Now, your small body has disappeared, I remember every detail of it and movement, every gesture: the way you spoke to yourself when you were alone for too long and also afterwards when we came back to you too

late...Mother your small body also disappeared because I made alliances with wild strong people against you just to conquer you...

May 18th, 2000, Montenegro coast

In Belgrade tonight my daughter is fighting my former war, now only hers.

The students and schoolchildren are now leading the demonstrations against our dictator and the ruthless repression we are living in. The policemen are at our doors, we receive threats through “friends,” the independent TV’s, NGOs are being closed and with them any life options other than fear and obedience. I told my daughter before left: if they come to our door, the local police, with any excuse, you are not to be afraid, this is your country, they are your police. And they did come and she let them in, without fear; she was bold and fearless and it worked against they who obviously performed their duty with fear.

I lost her during the bombings to her teenager’s life of adventure and there she is now, grown up. I hope that she makes it. I fear for her life, for her every limb, for every cell of her beloved body that I took care of so carefully, so hysterically... but I also fear for her happiness and for her love for me. She is somewhere out there on the streets of Belgrade on fire: beautiful, dark, angry, wild, long-limbed, fast and with her heart beating like in a rabbit. My little squirrel. I am with her now as I sit on the terrace watching the calm Montenegrin sea: full moon, full am I too. As if I were my mother who had done the same for me, without me noticing it for years or just taking it for granted as daughters do. If something happened to her, I would be gone at once even before her...

I listen to Chopin: it has become my mother’s voice now that she is dead. Who would Chopin ever be for me if it hadn’t been for my mother’s singing, whistling, making me play Chopin on the piano with her intensive emotional transfer and her beautiful dance with miniature feet in high heels, like champagne glasses around my piano ? I hated her for her magic spell, which made me play and love Chopin whom I never had a choice not to love. But now she lives in all the Chopin played around the world ...

May 22nd, 2000

Exactly six months since you died, again Monday as when you went. I woke up, my daughter was taking a shower in my bathroom, I covered my head with a pillow and slept on for hours. I do not know how many weeks are gone now, an eternity, less than forty, not enough time to have a baby and yet enough for a person like me to be aware that you are gone. I saw definitely at your grave that I have accepted the fact that you are somewhere else, not with us. The reality of your grave with always a fresh red rose we do not know from whom, your future. Cruel is oblivion.

I took your rose to another grave, a man I know you loved very much, a friend of yours. I did it with your intention and creativity...I looked at your friends and life survivors . I felt sorry for them. They were deaf, selfish, senile, mostly unhappy and frightened of their future...

Last night I dreamed I was in love, I felt that feeling but it was identified with you: alone in my bed I enjoyed the feeling of being open, soft and loved. I felt wanted and beautiful. Your death nearly destroyed me, destroyed such feelings in me , but it came back last night. These six months I learned how to use the memories of love to replace love. It was hard, it is ridiculous compared to those who still have real love, but still I had it. Who cares if it comes only in dreams, I can dream day and night.

Complete flatness and depression: hard, it is, to live without you.

The political life around me is just as you wanted it. Your beloved dictator the one you called, my little doll, is repressing us and giving all your good old fashioned Stalinist speeches. You are gone, but your visions have won.

May 24th, 2000

You were stubborn and wrong, so much, so often that you paid for it with your premature death. It was wrong and premature, I know, and I let you go, for punishment. I met two of your lady friends. One of them has all her family with her, the other buried them all, in reverse order: first her grandchild, then her daughter and finally her husband. Both were lively, walking down the road. I didn't want to speak to them; I turned my head away, because you were dead. You pretended to be one of them, as indifferent to life, but you weren't. Because in both cases, with your family dead or alive, you wouldn't be strolling as if nothing in this world was happening: you had emotions, strong opinions and you died for them. Who cares if you were wrong, that is a stupid detail...

May 25th, 2000

I definitely have accepted the fact that you are dead. Shame on me, shame on life.

May 26th, 2000

I behave as an ideal communist as you were dedicated to the everyday life of loving and cooking for my family as if it were building bridges, Without personal weakness, doubts, tears in my eyes...I am tough Mother, as you wanted me to be, as you pretended you were, I really am tough but from different causes: it wasn't a choice but a necessity of survival alone in this women's world of emancipation without love. And you look back at me with a smile from the photo above my computer that I keep to remind me of my duty to be tough. Rubbish, you say, Mina, rubbish: get on with your writing, with your ironing and bridges...you are just doing your work with dignity. Do not let anyone touch your work or

your dignity. Grow up, no tears, no doubts , it is a waste of time and a shame...Accept the fact that I am dead and gone, behave, stop acting as if my death was yours, you will have to deal with your own some day and it will not be easy, you will need time and knowledge, so do not be wasteful it...What a rush of words, Mother, today from this small photo in a frame shaped like a tiny silver kettle: literally. On one side of your smiling face , one can pour the tea, on the other, the handle of the boiling kettle. And as in a Japanese vase, you are in the middle, boiling fragrantly...

Your father, my grandfather, was a rich man and he owned lands and shops and flats; you decided when you were seventeen to join the clandestine communist party of Youth which fought against the rich and wealthy. You immediately turned against your own family and wealth. Turning against your family is normal but against your wealth meant that you considered that money dirty and that you wanted a world where life didn't depend on wealth. So you gave up your inheritance, treated your gentle and smiling father as a kulak as from a Stalinist manual...You risked your life conspiring against your own family and wealth. When the war started, communists were caught and killed by all the other sides. Especially the young ones. Some friends of yours did die that way, one of them sent you other girls a message: I am caught, run for your lives, if they torture me, I am sure to speak...

But history helped you with your ideology: first the war economy destroyed your family wealth, then the Germans occupied the country and looted the goods of Serbs, then the Russian liberators came and with a lot of fun and joy finished off the job...and finally your communists came in power and made it a law. Your family lost all, your father died of a heart attack, your brothers started drinking, developed cancers and died...all but you three women, disappeared. Your sister made fun of the new regime, your mother was amused by Tito's uniforms and you reigned against your past: no books, no decadence, no frivolities, no money...There was however something unconvincing in all that: my father got rich, you got powerful and I was brought up as a princess...You fell sick with asthma. When the Yugoslav Communist party asked you as a member to renounce to Stalin in 1948, you refused. You said, I refuse to change my mind only because you are changing your politics. When they told you about his misdeeds, you said, I refuse to believe it, and if it were even true, he must have had good reasons. When they wanted to put you in prison my father

pleaded, let her go, she is a crazy woman, just a woman, you know how women are, I will put her in order. And they did, but he never managed to make you change your mind. Nor he, nor I, nor anybody else could put you in order.

When you landed in London in the fifties and filled the immigration papers saying you were a communist, an active member of the party, you were invited by the official delegation of the government to express your wishes regarding your stay in Great Britain. You were visiting my Father so you said solemnly: thank you I already know all I need to know, I am here only to visit my husband.

May 28th, 2000

The two monkeys, the two sheep, the two clones, my father and me:

We do feel the same, both without hope of replacing you or being good but we do not feel bad about being bad.

May 29th, 2000

As my friend put it: after all these years, when I think of my late mother I feel a hole in my stomach. I feel hunger and pain reading the lines when I started missing her, three weeks after she died.

She couldn't live without me and I was pushing her away all the time, with bad words, and deeds; I thought I had a life of my own and that she was intruding and ruining it. She was lonely in her world of men and women behind their men, she wanted me to feel loved and be able to love. I cannot even tell you that I am sorry, my only hope is that you knew it. I remember when you spoke how sorry you felt for being demanding and cruel towards your mother. You told me how you would scold her after coming from the hospital for not cooking while she was taking care of me , washing my diapers with her old red hands...She who was a prewar lady but whom you reduced to your mother only, you ruling the world as a Lady Doctor

You must have known that I too would never feel regret until you went away.

Love is not measurable by love gestures, not even by cruelty; love is only measurable by the absence of it.

May 31st, 2000

I live with ghosts, I dream of you every night. There is music playing, a voice, an ecstasy, a color, and a baby We are alone. We are in many different places, rooms, overseas, in the boats, but we are cozy...even death cannot part us.

I wonder if your communist morality permitted roses and love? You denied love as well as sex. When I told you, scandalized and hurt, of being harassed by your family male friend, you just laughed it off scornfully: the old goat, you commented. When you told me about being harassed by my father's friend, you said: the fool thought I had time for such stuff. For me it was scandalous, immoral, I never dared tell you how shocked I was at their behavior and at your reaction to it. I never dared tell you how old fashioned, sentimental, romantic and concerned with romantic love and my body I was.

I knew that Communists were shot for being unfaithful to their partners but I also know of Communists performing free love like hippies. All your stories were contradictory and harsh, as was your ideology, based on a system of justice.

June 1st, 2000

Two quick images cross my mind: apparently nothing to do with each other

First:

You and my father in your matrimonial bed, each under her/his own covers, lying on your backs and holding hands shyly. The moment I enter the room, you pull out your hand out of his and hide it under your cover. Well, you definitely were shy, as far as intimacy was concerned. You never confessed any intimacy with any man. Otherwise you were not shy with your body. On the contrary you showed off your huge nude breasts . You aggressively joked with your body and we had to take part in it. You were actually violating our sense

of decency. Above your matrimonial bed, where you lay as formally as a corpse next to your lawful husband, my biological father, the only man in your life was hanging: The Nude Maya by Francisco Goya.

Second;

My grandmother, your mother, running through the night after her drunk son, your brother: the favorite one. We wake up because of the noise they make: they are in the beautiful rose garden, the pride of your household; he is swearing at her and she is trying to make him...Sit? Stop? What? Something as a mother, I guess...He shoves her off too heavily (she was a small woman, not as small as you were, maybe my size) and she loses her balance. Does she fall? I don't remember. You quickly take me away from the window, I just remember the defensive but firm attitude of granny's body, ready to die for her favorite son. You, too, were like that, ready to die for the people you loved, and him in particular. He was a disappointed, spoiled and decadent, once handsome and successful guy, ruined by communists. Your ideology, your new life. The heir of the dynasty. You instead were an unwanted late child of my granny. You told me how your brothers were ashamed as adults, of their mother being pregnant and producing a baby. Even with her lawful husband, their father, in a well off household. They wanted to suffocate you and bury you in their famous rose garden. (My great aunt actually did it to her baby, being unmarried and poor and her mother went to jail instead of her because she was under age. She bore 18 more children when she got married, a witch they called her, because some children she loved some she didn't, some were extremely good tempered and some plain bad). But then you became their favorite toy: the baby sister of whom they took severe care until she got married. They didn't let you look at men before getting married, less talk to them. Now, that was patriarchal Serbia: a big rich decadent family, your and my family, with a hidden violence which Matrimony took care of. You interiorized the conservative order, violence, and style... and besides getting asthma late at 45 (my age now), you managed to have a forbidden wild love story as a very young girl: in front of their blind eyes, a secret. Nothing I know for sure, it is just a wild guess, that you never denied nor confessed, making my father crazy with your proud and absolute silence. Maybe there was really nothing to it but your proud silence stirred my imagination and his jealousy. Now that you are gone, I could make novels, poems, Wuthering Heights, Romeo and Juliet, out of your matrimonial silence...

June 2, 2000

My depression. I want to think back about my huge depression, which burst out in May when I was 17. I was in bed for 3 months sleeping 18 hours a day and reading a book over and over the rest of the time. Last night I dreamt of coffins, of dead people in my flat, of unknown dead. It wasn't even sleeping, but a state in which my depression came out. This diary, this journey to sealing our bond, our Matrimony is written on small sheets of papers, on napkins, on the tablecloth before it vanishes into thin air, into rationality, into ready-made answers. I woke up, jumped out of bed, fumbled around for a pencil and wrote on torn pieces of a paper. It was dark, it was outside reason. I didn't have time to open the computer, drink coffee, it was a physiological urge. See what came out of it:

I remember the other part of depression we had in my dream: repression. A memory: my father's mother was very tall and strong woman, when he married you, small and thin, she thought you could never bear him children. And according to her you didn't, girls do not count in that part of the world. When single or alone they dress as a man in order to survive. When you first went to visit her, she hung a rope up very high. She asked you to wash the laundry and hang it on the rope. You tried: she brought out all of her family and friends and they giggled and sneered while you jumped up and down...At that point you called my father, her son, whom she called her eagle, and made him do what in that part of the world only women dare do publicly: hang the laundry What a revenge. She never forgave you but she respected you as a doctor. When she would come to your home in Belgrade however, she would ask to take your place in your life with your husband, her Eagle. She would argue, I had him first, he is mine. Willingly you gave him back but he never agreed to go. Once again she lost and respected you even more. My poor cruel

grandmother who never gave me a glance because I was a tiny girl, realized that she could be a woman without being beaten, killed or humiliated and you made her understand that. You, a communist and a lady. My grandmother was a Herzegovina peasant married to a Serb who worked as the manager of the Austro-Hungarian prison. In order to marry her, he kidnapped her. She had 13 children and later took care of 17 grandchildren by smuggling tobacco through the frontlines for enemy soldiers, to keep her babies from starving. She was regularly beaten by her husband, a violent alcoholic who lived in the city, according to my father's story. Whilst the official version was that he was a model citizen, an extremely respectable and well-off member of the community and his name even today is used as a symbol of better times. She was an enormous and very pretty woman. My father loved her as tenderly as he could, having left home when he was 13, sent away to survive and to change the family script. He did it Mother, thanks to you, too.

You told me that my father made you stop working, that he was often jealous when you earned more money than he did or when you came home late from a night shift in the hospital. You also said that you didn't mind stopping working so you could spend more time with me and your family, as well as have time for yourself. You also said more than once that you got your asthma because of my father, and that made him really angry. Nevertheless you kept repeating it and when you died I believed you at once: he survived you and at once took two young women to take care of him as you did alone for all those years. He stared sadly and in wonder at your small dead body saying: all these years and she looks just like a little girl. He did take care of you, he did love you,

and you both lived in a different time than now. You knew how to appreciate his often rough way of loving and returned his love tenderly, not as the monster but as a man of your dreams: clean and hard-working, as you used to praise him, as if he were a true prince. But still you got asthma. You died in silence, as a little girl. Sometime I am angry with you for that, but most of the time I admire you.

June 3rd, 2000

Scenes, and more scenes emerging as clues to Big Secrets, My mother and Me: I run down the dark stairway and images burst in my head, and light my path, I do not stumble but run on through another time, another stairway...

We are in a train, we are coming back from visiting my granny, I am so small, I am mute and I am hugging you, not letting you go, not letting you sit, not letting you eat...My aunt, whom I adored, is sitting in front of us and eating a chicken - Serbian women always eat chicken in trains, to feel cool...But not us, you are a lady and you are returning from abroad, having left me alone with my aunt and my granny in the countryside...Now, two questions, Mother, for you: for how long was I left alone...and why afterwards I did stop talking and why do I hate country and chicken?

I cannot understand why you never remember for how long: a month, two, six months?...It is the measure of reality I miss in your stories, Mothers are the biggest liars, natural born liars...

Holding you tightly and never letting you go, I remember that as a normal scene of love...now that you are gone...

You were also a comic mother, with big ears like a Batwoman, and they called you the woodpecker for your nagging and criticizing, whilst my diary is some kind of Donald Duck strip for my friends who need to cry...You liked to hang upside down from the bed, in your underwear, laughing...

June 5th, 2000

But also it is an unhappy woman gone. And she took all her unhappiness with her, away from us. Did she bring it into our lives, or did we actually give her all our unhappiness to deal with?

I still do not believe in death and Mother, you are my proof against death. The fact that you lived and that you are my mother is my proof that death doesn't exist and that I should not be afraid of it.

After you left, my father at first wanted to die. He tried to go after you, searching for you among the dead and then he tried to find among the living: a substitute for you, his drug. He didn't manage either of the two options, so in order to stay alive (he made that decision when he found out that it s too difficult to die), he went back to his youth, before he knew you and he became a different person: more superficial, lively, primitive...different all in all. I guess I could have been the child only of my father, actually that is what we pretended all these years, that I had nothing to do with the unhappy woman that you were, our dustbin for our unhappiness, and maybe your parents' too...But now I see that you did leave me a Matrimony, as a burden, as a fair share of unhappiness. Not to him, who turned into a young man, but only to me who turned into an older woman older than him. I am older than my father is, and it is your doing.

All of a sudden I feel that, all this is normal, everything is normal, the drama is gone, what the hell am I writing about, everybody has a mother who, if things turn happily, dies before them. I am making a fuss out of nothing, as usual, the stupid emotional woman who writes, who will never be a true writer, never be reasonable, rational, one who people read with joy, as I do other writers. Maybe I could become one of those wise people, if only I stopped feeling sorry for myself and dwelling on my emotions, stopped feeling guilty and having so much spare time... actually I have done nothing for weeks, months, but this writing; I do not clean my house, I do not earn money, I indulge my feelings, ignoring my political, social responsibilities...what a bore, what a spoiled daughter I am. You would despise me, you who made all this happen.

But these days the police are searching our homes: they have entered the flat of Women in Black and the spaces of a few other groups I am related too. I guess you would be pleased with that too: finally somebody will teach you a lesson, you would say, traitors all of you traitors to your countries, women and traitors, what a shame...

I threw away the joint I had in my drawer. Nothing else, I do not want to go to prison as a common criminal, like Al Capone for taxes, I want to go to prison as a woman traitor.

June 6th, 2000

Today I realize what a hard life I have, much harder than yours, and that is why today I do not miss you at all. You wouldn't understand my problems, on the contrary, I would have to hide them away from you, from your contempt and worry. It is nice to be motherless in certain situations of absolute unhappiness: you can just disappear under a carpet as a crumb and nobody will look for you... you can come back as a cockroach and nobody will judge you...now that is nice.

Your time is over, even mine will be soon, the time of a daughter of such a mother as you were. Pity you cannot live the last moment of your victory, pity I am here to live your victory as my death. You are safe somewhere else and I am exposed here to storms of cruel political changes where all those who did not exclude will be judged for their inclusiveness. You have done the same in your cruel times. But I never did it or will I: because I cannot cut off from you, from my parents, in order that I not be cut off by my daughter, by my children. The fate of the go between. I live on your love as if it were mine, the fate of a bridge, that in every war will be the first to fall.

June 7th, 2000

In a way, in a very true way, my father and you together destroyed my life.

I saw a woman on the street, white haired, elegant, ladylike, it might have been you, and then I started suffering, but I was carrying food , I had to hurry to prepare dinner for the family and it just stopped: all of my suffering. So I realized that pain, in many cases is a luxury, writing a hobby , and, of course, between cooking and cleaning I am writing and suffering. One always has time for love and pain...

June 8th, 2000

I could have been a nun, maybe even a saint, but not a good woman. I was never a good daughter, a good mother, a good wife. I love being it and doing it, but I do it as a saint or as a nun, or as a bad woman. Finally I know what we are speaking here about; about me being a bad woman to a woman who knew how to be good.

All funerals I see, I hear of, are yours immediately, all deaths I hear of, whether of people I know or know not, immediately return me to my trauma.

June 9th, 2000

I have to cook, I have to clean, and I have to make meatballs and mashed potatoes with red tomato sauce as you did. They ask and expect me to do not only things you did but the way you did them. I hate that: that was your role, it was your main job, towards the end your only job, to satisfy family hungers. That is not me. I take care of them but differently. You do not like my attitude, even now from your grave where you are cool and unhappy, not able to take part in my daily life. To intrude with love, to cross my boundaries...I am aggressive toward people who intrude in my privacy, I see it everywhere since you are gone, but I also see how often I let them do it because of you, because you are gone and I remember it as love ...

June 10th, 2000

As I let my daughter abuse my weakness toward mother/daughter love, and as I fry potatoes and meat balls at 40 degrees C, sweating, fainting, getting burnt with sparkles of stinking oil.... Knowing that she won't even eat it...knowing that she asked me as a proof of love and obedience... wrong words, wrong deeds in the name of love...I remember how you did it the same as I. Your little hands ruined with rheumatism and bruised by asthma treatments were also scarred by oil; breathing heavily as an Olympic runner and yet you seemed stable. Not like me, always ready to complain or analyze the mechanisms. And you know, Mother why, because you taught us to play that game, because you wanted it and enjoyed it . The eternal game of emotional mother/daughter blackmail. Now, that game bonded us. We erased boundaries so you could control me and protect me. Then you pursued the same politics with my daughter, as if one generation wasn't enough . I know how men regard Matrimony as a bond that never skips a generation, that never can be broken because of its invisible continuity, through food , upbringing of babies...But Mother, it is chains you reproduced and protected as our bondage and never did you let me set us both free.

June 11th, 2000

Last night I spoke with such calm of your death that all present became a cruel audience. I thought all of a sudden, now I know how people become cruel and commit crimes. First the Punishment then the Crime. Then this friend of mine told me how her mother died, much younger, much more cruelty and crime involved... I thought, well if this beautiful young woman is here sitting with me on the Danube on a hot summer day enjoying life, then I too will be free some day, maybe very soon, I will be free of you. And then I can also stop writing.

But in the morning I woke up with a guilty conscience and feeling as if you had just died that very morning and not so many mornings ago. Each and every morning I wake up with a feeling of a heavy loss, what has changed however is that when I try to recover my memory regarding the heavy loss, the thought of you dead comes more easily day by day. Except when I try to kill you on a summer night on the Danube.

Am I going crazy with this writing, is the writing soothing me or exciting me? Is it a therapy or a torture? I guess both, as all things in life are that matter.

June 13th, 2000

Bad days for me, I did not think of you yesterday because I had bigger trouble, fear, threats: protecting my family, protecting our lives from criminals, from political crime...

The guy who wrecked our car is now threatening us for claiming our money from our insurance. At this time in history, when crime is in power small criminals also have their way with us common citizens.

I understand it perfectly but you wouldn't, you would be as brave and mad as a hatter with the common criminal who would be more likely to kill you than the political one who has different targets

So I forgot you, the moment I became you I completely forgot you. You made huge mistakes, but you did things. This morning, coming back from the market I realized I didn't miss you because I was leading your life: of guilt, of aggressor, of victim, of a mother, of a crazy woman, of a stupid woman... with dignity or without it, just as you did it, I made all the mistakes women do in those situations...overprotection, overreaction, overdoing...

June 15th, 2000

More and more, I understand why you died and why you went away before my father, in that state in that shape; only your enormous mind and strength lay in that bed, the body was already gone, decayed, transformed into an old dying woman. But I saw you intact with your eyes still blue.

When you refused to have a sex life with him many years ago, was it a divorce or a preservation effort? Out of spite, revenge or self punishment?

I think you did right to waste your body while keeping your mind alert: but nevertheless we must say it openly: your death wasn't natural. Again, a murder, your body was used and misused and you spent it unselfishly in order to keep your mind sane.

I am talking about your choice to use heavy medicine that kept your mind safe but ruined your body. As a doctor you knew that you were becoming a junky too. Doctors are often too comfortable with their drugs and bodies. Not like common people under pain and restraint. You refused to suffer pain or depression.

I am now on the same path of yours: of passion, of never giving up, of physical pain from violence, of unwilling heroism...and I wonder if I should continue on this woman's way, as if I had any choice. My way is definitely somewhat easier than yours was and there are some improvements in the details, important details, but still the story is the same. Of a fable turning nasty, of wasting the body in order not to lose the mind, or become a crazy woman without limits because she didn't do what she wanted, and who can answer with violence because violated she was.

I am going back to my childhood. I am abducted by you and taken to times when I was a kid. We travel together through time...maybe I am dead and but I do not know it, maybe you do not even know that you are dead...

What a safe place a dead mother is, not comparable to having loving one...

June 17th, 2000

I am still using the creams, the nightgowns, the toothbrushes you left: the napkins, the handkerchiefs, the home made jam... the old fashioned Serbian, but European, way of living... a theatre, a doll's house . How long will it last? Other family members are taking them as museum articles; people are afraid to deal with somebody else's dust...

I am wearing your nightgown. A few hours ago, while walking under the bridge, I remembered how you never could choose. My mother always ruined her own pleasure and choice by saying to herself: I should have done the other thing, the opposite one. I was wrong and now I will pay for that. To make life easier for her I told her, once when she was undecided as to which dress to buy: Buy both of them, and she did it. But at home she said angrily, I was wrong to buy both of them, you made me do it. Another thing was that she always had somebody else to blame. And she used the word guilty all the time. My daughter, among her first words picked up that one, shouting: guilty, I want to be guilty...

When crossing the bridge, thoughts of death swarmed my mind. I asked myself in calm panic: maybe somebody is dying in this moment and I am sensing it by wanting to jump off the bridge and drown like Virginia Woolf in a river. I remembered how when leaving you that last day, a thought crossed my mind so fast that I didn't even catch it: that maybe there won't be a tomorrow for us two. Now I am wearing your nightgown, the one you died in. Today on the bridge I had a feeling of my astral body leaving me and watching from somewhere high in the sky as my material body crossed the bridge. It lasted for a few seconds and it was beautiful. I remember it happening to me to me before on a clear sunny day. I was very young and I thought I saw God

She was an old, depressed, half-deaf, half-blind and immobile woman for quite a few years before she died. She went away to stop this unruly way of life, so different from how quick, sharp and singing it used to be...Last year she pretended with me to be the woman I used to know, to fight, to love...I regretted for every second of her pretence, but I also enjoyed the shift of power, finally bedridden and weak and yet as proud and wrong as ever...and intruding, more than ever... But as an intelligent realistic woman she knew her time was over and she knew how to lose a battle. At least to a daughter. I am proud of her for that, I know that many mothers are not capable of giving in, especially to their daughters. And fathers even more than mothers.

The way we talked the last few years, she pretended to listen to me and even to agree with me. But I could see clearly her immediate loss of interest in my interests and views as well as an urge to impose, intrude, dominate...But cruelly, I would insult her in order to make her stop and to hurt her. I would feel sorry afterwards, I thought I was the only mortal of

the two...and this time it was I who was wrong. Who knows what else I am doing all wrong without the faintest doubt of my rectitude. You told me you did that too but you never told me your , that you were not an Immortal Goddess but only My Mother.

I am sick these days with excessive emotions of our everyday life and overactive subconscious; these are the times when you become visible in the details all around my house, but your visibility is not the Patrimony of your sweaters and jams, it resembles ruins, scattered debris, a sense and importance belonging to another time, to a different forgotten perspective...in such days of complete breakdown my Matrimony hurts. In my sleep I suddenly see the sense to our lives, to our continuity but when I awaken, I have only the memory of a sense... the healing function of dreams. Matrimony is somewhere deep down inside dreams, with or without sense. Dreams are where it is integral and from where it must be dug out, if not surgically extracted, to light and sense: I will dig my Matrimony out of Patrimony.

June 20th, 2000

In a film, Gene Hackman is playing my father and a big-mouthed daughter is playing me whilst a Jewish mother dies as a victim between the two clones who have fought each other all their lives.

Everything is in that Hollywood film, senses of guilt and of nonsense. I watch the film with tears and a headache. Hollywood, oh how stupid and convincing : what is my Matrimony, our Matrimony, Mother compared to a happy ending? Today also a Hollywood soap opera used the word Matrimony for Marriage. I immediately stopped writing, as if my Matrimony was emptied of truth.

When I tried to fight with my father, he would attack me through you. Mother was for Matrimony confrontation even if patriarchal interests were behind.

He would say to you, I love her too much, I cannot fight her, I will die. Just tell her not to stamp her feet in my presence.

June 21st, 2000

So many scenes. Your words spring to my mind while I walk, or do something completely irrelevant. They all seem so important that I doubt they are. I must become selective but how, everything about you is important, because final, eternal...The smile of pain you had when my cousin, your niece, died, as if you knew you would live another year and twelve days and then, the two of you would break my heart. The way you cried, and would not let me get angry at her death that I called murder. You never let me get mad at family life, you always wanted us to live all together happily ever after without really making big moves, ignoring the deeds and words, even murders. How could you, Mother, where did you find strength and reason to do so? Like that Jewish mother from the film you never let us fight anything out and move past problems, make a change, you just kept the water still around us, all in the same boat, in an eternal ocean, and it seemed that you won, until you died.

Mother I was in your home today: the family is different without you. Father is speaking a different language, his own. Oh don't worry he is OK, he just isn't himself anymore, the guy we both knew, my father, your husband. Remember when you said: he is building a shell around himself, he is becoming a snail, and he wants to live forever. You saw it on your death bed. Too many things to say and yet it is too little, I can hardly go on this way. I guess you are becoming somebody else, not only My Mother.

June 23, 2000

You see Mother I am changing in such a hurry that I am mourning myself too...I am grieving over my lost life that I never loved. I prefer my new self, the free bold girl out in the big bad world fighting for her vices, to the depressed, loved and stupid baby I was in your arms...But my change is your death.

June 24th, 2000

Once again I broke a jar with your jam. I broke two in one week, because twice in one week I tried to take some from your cupboard, home to eat. The last ones, the very last ones, one of those recipes you never gave me, from which I never asked and which will disappear from our kitchen in a month or two. I cannot understand what kind of superiority mine is, the superiority of an inferior. I am ashamed of the feeling. As when common people conquer a royal palace. I am never ashamed for not being good, but only for not being true.

June 25th, 2000

Many bad habits that you passed on to me I am turning into knowledge, if only we could talk and work them out together. Anxiety, fear of death, is subconscious aggression. You had it toward me; I have it toward my daughter. Yet, I know it is love, judging from my own anxiety, but I also know that it doesn't look like love, that maybe it is love corrupted into destruction, and that it is the wrong language of love. Love and repression, love and shame of love and fear of love, love and anxiety of being loved back...

The good habits I hated you also passed on to me; I am changing the tablecloth in the dining room. Your tablecloth, you left many, you were buying beautiful tablecloths all your life and collecting them for my home; I thought they were extremely ugly and I never imagined my home with tablecloths. I was wrong: now I am using them and admiring them. I remember with how much love you worked on them, to make a table rich with food, and flowers and how you enjoyed your work of the domestic beauty I scorned and abandoned

I was oppressed by your way of thinking beauty. I had no chance with you; you never gave me any choice except to pursue your way. I am doing it finally...again no winners, no losers...

June 27th, 2000

You turned into a nasty woman just a few years before you died. I wonder why, no woman turns nasty without a very good reason. Your smile didn't become sour, it became wicked. You were not an ordinary person who becomes depressed when you are harassed, as I am. No, the world made you pay in advance. But what really happened I do not want to know, I didn't know the good life you had, it was a Big Secret, why should I know the bad side to it. I acted as a nasty woman today toward your husband, my father. I never did that before, on the contrary, I was kind when you were nasty to him. Actually I do know what made you turn bad, the same thing that made me turn bad and act as I do. Small deeds of cowardice, of egomania, of male domination...But when constant, when everyday, when without conscience or shame, they make you react as we do...the bad women...

Images flying as flies, as mosquitoes, biting, itching, swelling... energy cannot die or disappear, these images flying around, that is life too...

Out of context: you smiling, the next image is you turning in bed with pain, then you as a little girl breathing heavily under a pine tree, not knowing you were allergic, not knowing your fate, not caring to know it... Maybe it is I, not you who makes those images. Most of the time I catch your images without order, I just follow them, drifting like kites...

Oh I almost forgot: since you died I have recovered my ability to make decisions. I do not even remember losing it but I am sure nobody is born without it. Not even you who perfected in a decision and forced to decide, denied all responsibility.

My mother despised all mysticism, she was scientific and skeptical: she would despise my writing on her, she never really liked literature, preferring The Truth. This is a heavy abuse

of her personality and I am doing it because I want to conquer her and her death allows me to do so. At least my motives are not a mysterious even if my story on her may be so.

28 June, 2000

I am thinking about historical guilt, preparing a speech, on decent people, on deceived people in my country. You always come to my mind, whatever I am thinking of. I heard of a woman whose mother is dying and that she is going through a very painful process, doubting everything . In my fits of anxiety, I do not even have images of your face. Any image can do. All the untold stories that can never be told make them fit: finally, silence is telling the stories, a silence that is as noisy as an earthquake, unfolding a different language from the one we used to share. It was the language of the oppressor and we used it to stay alive. Now that you are gone you are dictating new words to me and I am obediently taking them down.

Who knows what new truths, axioms and reparations of injustice we may invent, through fits and delusions.

Some people are reading our diary mother, forgive me, all those who need it are our kin.

June 29, 2000

We refused to take part in Men's lives, under their rules. At the same time, we refused to be disloyal and make a life of our own, because we love our men. As kamikaze pilots, sacrificing their lives out of duty... Alone in a vacuum, in a *amor vacui*, the beginning of your slow withering to death... When I took my daughter back from you, your cycle of order and service ended. You died of solitude, a woman's death. Life hasn't changed much for a woman .Who knows what you knew in your life about injustice. But you stayed quiet and didn't rebel. Your rebellion was invisible but very concrete, fragmented into many small rebellions, small things, shattering the big picture of an unjust world ...

Oh Mother, would I be crying even if you were not gone, because of the rain, because of the injustice. How many other times have I behaved this way without the excuse of you being dead and you would say: Mina, why make us all unhappy, don't you realize you have it all, just let things go, keep silent and enjoy yourself...But stubbornly I refused to remain silent in an unjust world, taking you with me out of ivory tower and into the guts of the street.

June 30th, 2000

I have a hole in my heart, it is not in my stomach anymore and I am burning out. You are, a star, far away from us, untouchable and yet flowing through my body: I sucked you as a star absorbs the light of another... You burned out fast, you spent it all. I decided to do the same. Father, instead, will live as a rock for a thousand years, he comes from a rocky place where poverty and rocks make life and beauty, and now he is turning from a crazy overactive businessman and a attentive father into a beautiful ancient, insensitive rock. You shone until the very last , shrinking, a smaller and smaller star, until a ray of light and then no more...I remember that look in your blue eyes, just a ray...

I don't even make sense anymore. It is because of the hole in my heart: I am disappearing from the center to the margins.

July 1st, 2000

Yesterday your husband was packing: he is due to leave for mountains for the first time without you. I went to help him pack, I didn't have to but without you he had nobody to hold on to, to scream at. He didn't do that to me, and he had hardly anything to pack, a chess set, some medicines...Well it was really sad, I fumbled through your drawers, I

picked up your beautiful untouched underwear that I used to buy for you on my trips around the world, and that you kept for God knows what...and packed that too. Then we both decided to do things as if you were alive: to pack many unnecessary things, to organize in the mountains dinners, food supplies. More work, more ridiculous work that neither of us enjoyed until this year when it gave life to a Ghost.

As in a well, drops of pain fall, without hope, without limit...I raise my eye during a conversation with someone, I look at a passer by and my thoughts wander, fly to you, somewhere in the cosmos and then drops tickle my face and run down to the invisible well where we keep our inner selves in the dark, in safety.

I slept in your long sleeved nightgown, I felt hot and warm and safe.

July 2nd, 2000

Mother, I just realized that, notwithstanding the fact that I was your only child, I had a rival sister. Now she is living with my father, doing the things you used to do and that I should have done. She is half a substitute of you and half of me: she is an artificially bred sample but an excellent specimen. Except for being fake she is perfect. She even loves me as a sister and you as a dead mother. Her mother died when she was a kid and you were her mother afterwards... Stunt-daughter.

July 4th, 2000

How clearly your face comes back to me: I do not want to live without you today Mother. Your decent death was the most a decent person could leave to her daughter. I wish you were less decent, I wish you mistreated me, I wish you didn't love me the way you did so that all the love I get from others seems pointless. I wish you explained to me how you loved me so that I could build a new love in case of your death. I do not want to stay here anymore: nobody really wants me when I am down, when I cry, when I am stupid and

boring, and I am that all the time. A very bad day for me today. After all these months some things are just as new, as fresh. I do not need time, you made chaos out of my mind and out of time, I need something else. I am not asking you to come back from your rest. I am asking for something to hold on to. Maybe you should have left me something besides dresses, nightgowns, furs, silver, napkins, photos. You said, I leave all to you ... I wish you had not...it is so hard to have it all and yet have nothing to hold on to.

July 5th, 2000

The past few nights have been tortures not only nightmares with pictures of you, dying or living. It was 43 degrees C, the heat was evaporating you from my body and driving my mind crazy. This morning I heard this story: a mother was dying of cancer, painfully. Her daughter was assisting her with obsessive devotion. The mother looked straight into her eyes and said "Fuck off, for heaven's sake."

The daughter laughed and cried, but will never get over it, I am sure. Where do these words come from?

And I missed you: you did it to me all the time, you were extremely cruel, only to me, never to a stranger and now I miss that too. Would I want to have back an old deformed nasty woman called my Mother torturing me from a wheelchair? Yes anytime, all the time...that nasty woman would absorb all my nightmares in her deformed body and put them into her nasty words...

July 7th 2000,

Vienna...

Mother, I nearly bought you a pair of beautiful shoes, a small ladylike pair of hand-crafted Italian at Stephenplatz.

I am sitting on the pavement and weeping. My legs failed me when I got out of the shop. I haven't thought of you for two days, even though I talked of you and your death. You see,

I knew that you were dead, and still I wanted to buy them. All those years I've been bringing you things you never wore but which made you happy. Why should I stop now?

July 8th, 2000

I am sitting lost in space. I didn't sleep the whole night, I drank beer and then I missed my train by 7 minutes. I never missed a train in my life: but now that I lost you, I am losing everything, without regrets.

A disturbed person is sitting next to me and acting out. Another one in front of me is dancing. I can understand these people spending their time in railway stations, pretending to travel but keeping still. That is exactly the opposite of my trip. I am travelling but remaining always in the same place with you.

My feelings are huge and immobile and nothing can really move me away from them.

Mother, I was completely lost today in Budapest at the bus station: they robbed me. They took my purse, your purse; the one I have been carrying around the world ever since you died. I was so helpless that anybody could have done it, even worse things. This world is too violent for me. For you and your small asthmatic body it must have been impossible to survive any longer.

Sitting today in the train compartment with a mother and two small daughters while they showed every second that they belonged to each other, excluding me. I realized that without you even women have become my enemies. I am nobody's daughter anymore, I am not an object of endless love, so how can I be a mother then?

July 9th, 2000

You see the difference between an ordinary love story and the mother/daughter one is that your lover and you can love again other lovers. Whilst we two, any two women in such a relationship, cannot love again in the same way.

Tomorrow is my daughter's birthday. I did love again, I loved her

With your love, and you loved her with my love. We did it all together and she will carry it on to her children giving it all away in order to keep it going.

Today I feel relieved that I was robbed yesterday. We got rid of something, both of us: of your old purse, of useless credit cards, of a small amount of money we considered big. Neither of us ever knew the price of money. We treated money as objects or people. As if I had been raped, I still feel the touch on my shoulder as the robber was fumbled through my bag. He got the wrong purse as far as money was concerned but he got the right purse as far as hurting was concerned. I feel humiliated. I feel the violence, and that he took *your* purse away. I could have fought him back, physically, to recover it. My first instinct was to do so. But an image sprang to my mind. I remembered you, a tiny angry woman throwing herself at a moving car that tried to avoid the queue. You didn't care for your life or the "decency" of a lady/wife/mother. You just cared for justice, as Jeanne d'Arc. As a kid I was afraid for you, I am not sure it was admiration. But you stopped the perpetrator, justice was done, and you became a lady again.

I didn't fight the perpetrator. The difference between you and me, as usual, was my fear. I am reconstructing the psychological state of the criminal who assaulted me and deprived me of your purse. It was slow and premeditated. I had the movement of a victim, and the face of fear and insolence, that of a daughter. Had it not been so, he wouldn't have done it. He had doubts, but my insolence made him hurt me and also drop a bigger plan of taking it all from me and hurting me badly. But he didn't know that I cared only for that tiny purse not for my body, and that by taking it, he made it personal, a rape.

My words are starting to sound false to me. I do not know what literature is made of, but I definitely know that love is made of true emotions, which in certain moments become fake and start to mean the opposite of what they used to mean.

I met a woman who is a mother to a daughter as you used to be for me. She stands every night at the window waiting for her daughter, she identifies with her life and is ready to kill or die for her. I hated her, all of a sudden all my hate for you came out and struck her face.

She wore expensive Italian shoes and made me buy the same. I did it for you, Mother. I didn't buy the shoes for you because you bought them for me. Notwithstanding the fact that you are dead, death cannot part us where shopping is concerned....

July 10th, 2000

Endless crying today, sobbing, tears as a curtain to my eyesight...My daughter's birthday, the first without you and definitely not the last one. I am preparing the food, the cakes, so nervous that I can hardly keep myself from throwing all away, motherless, childless, without this stupid middle-class rubbish of parties, cakes, emotions...

She is demanding, harassing me, expecting your style, your cakes. But I am refusing to be you, so you see, I have no way out but madness, to be you and not to be you at the same time...

On her first birthday I was so brave that I left her with you and spent the first two days without her since she was born. She didn't notice it, but you did and you were happy about it, for her to be all yours and for me to be finally sleeping and having fun.

I didn't feel guilty about that and I wondered why I could act so differently from custom, which usually has a rooted meaning that important for all people. Birthdays are important for mothers and daughters since you have my birthday as your big ordeal with life and I have hers...But I was so informal because you were there, you lived my life instead of me, which was often horrible, but sometimes wonderful. We transgressed with our roles, we actually made confusion in the cosmos and now we are being punished. You, in being subject to an accident of chance by and me surviving as after an accident...

11th July

Last night I had the mean eyes of an harassed woman, exactly as you had: I was in your home, alone, for the first time after you died. Your house will never change, whatever we do. My father really tried but the concept is yours, as in a pyramid, however you turn it keeps its shape. Last night in order to break the passive spell of a mean woman suffering without a mask and becoming her mother, I fumbled again through your things. Every time I do it, I find more beautiful things, but still I do not take them. I am afraid to ruin them. I took a jacket and that evening it was as if I was wearing a queen's frock. Your beautiful clothes meant happiness to you, now they represent memories of a happy era gone like abandoned palaces. You, Biljana, my aunt, all the woman I loved were part of a romantic system of women who lived in the shade, knitting and being happy, as in Russian novels, as in courts... But my reality: I am the only one still alive.

Messing through your stuff that I should give away or throw away, (the AWAY is what bothered me), I found in your passport a very small photo of a young handsome man. You kept photos hidden among your things: of your mother, old and blind, of dead brothers you didn't speak of, of my daughter looking funny, of me in some stupid age dressed as you liked... And now this man, whoever he is, entering our intimacy...

July 12, 2000

Last night my nightmare was a remake: you die. My father calls me. I go there. I do not want to see you dead. I expected you to die. I am not surprised. I even go to the opening evening of my film and everybody comes to say sorry. I am wearing your shoes... tight shoes but I am free in them and warm and it really takes time for me to realize that you are gone forever.

Now in my dream the elapsed time was included. This absolutely "normal" re-enactment of your death became a nightmare because only today, many months later, I am feeling it as I should have felt it at the time. Even pain needs time.

What is popping up now are your funny glances, those that I will never forget, those that I couldn't understand but which I now catch myself wearing: half glances actually, half meanings, double messages, codes...

I understand every one of them only today. The worried look you put on your face whenever I made big plans, the skeptical look whenever I spoke about public life, the angry look whenever I was foolish...How aggressive your behavior seemed to me. Your constant criticism of my behavior, of my looks... I was convinced you really thought I was stupid and ugly, and I ran away from you all the time in order to feel intelligent and pretty. Of course you were wrong to do it: harsh and petty as only a mother can be. But what I know now is that you didn't mean it. What is that world in between reality and intentions, that I only now understand after you paid with your life for the neglect of your own body and beauty, for your big troubled soul, your bad conscience and wicked mind, for your love for people who did not understand it.

This in between world of half signs is tormenting me, not only in our relationship but in all love relationships.

July 13th, 2000

I want you alive, but as perfect as you are now, dead.

I talk to my father, he seems to have calmed down, and he is taking a rest from his love of you. What about you? Is energy eternal ?

Ever since you were born you had to fight for your tiny life, as the late baby of an old mother, as an unwanted sister, as a sick teenager, as a young communist risking her life in World War II ... then again, with my father, with your sickness...

The images of how I too abused your health haunt me: your labored breathing as you served me, in order to prove your love for me. Because everybody did it, I wanted to punish you instead of protecting you. I abused my cousin too, and now I am killing some other people I love...I could have spared you on so many occasions, but I thought it was your choice. I wasn't wrong, but I was cruel, I remember revenge and cruelty tingling in my veins...What a revenge, what a victory, what a fool...

I remember straining your energy and your nerves just because you made it possible.

All these images of abuse and injustice as toward slaves who do not know better than to serve their masters have now become a part of a global picture of my Guilt. And others will abuse me because of it. Is that how injustice works its way?

July 14th, 2000

After all these months, I am sitting alone in your flat where you expired your last. Our flat, our life: the scene of life and crime. I knew you wanted to die in your own bed, in your own room, once mine. The part of the bed where you lay was where I slept before leaving home. I was your grave because you were my cradle. That is about the most that a daughter can do for the mother who cradled her in her tummy for nine months: to prepare a grave, to warm her a place for her to die safely.

You were lucky, Mother: some women not only do not have daughters who will do that for them but they end up in a hospital, as our lovely Biljana, the Queen of AIDS ward, without even a proper bed of their own because people are afraid of other people dying at home, as if death was contagious. As if death was a shame... Though your death was a disgrace for all of us...

This flat, this room, this bed make me claustrophobic, everything happened here, in this space. What a lively life it was: blood all over but we went on as if nothing was happening until one day, completely unexpectedly, I left you and all the magic was over.

You lived ten years more, you survived it, but without my blood it was never the same: just a poor remake. I could not stay on. I had to stay alive. I acted on instinct. You were stronger, shrewder and merciless on your territory... I couldn't overturn your rules, so I ran like a coward away . You never forgave me that, after many threats and blackmail you just withered away as an abandoned woman. Eventually you died.

However, deep down in our connection you knew that I fed you with my blood for all these years to make you live longer. When my life became endangered I backed off. I had to save my daughter from you . She followed me in silence. Even though, she could have won you. She is as tough as you were. But it wasn't her goal, to forgive you, only mine.

Your sofa, your photos your breath... I am not sobbing; I am not falling apart or sinking. I am actually enjoying it: with you.

I see your face in the very place where it stopped seeing me: what an emotion...Did we know it all the time or just at the end that it would actually take place here, at a certain hour? I spent here all the crucial moments of my life: with my doubts, with my hopes , with my books, with my baby... Am I preparing my new bed for my deathbed? Definitely things do not happen by accident. But I do not know the rules, because I am not the creator and master of them, and I refuse to know.

All of a sudden I feel dizzy and sick. I rush out of the room, out of the flat, out of the building...out of our life. As I always used to run away in order not to suffocate. After all, this is a self-therapy...

July 15th, 2000

Cleaning your stuff out of the garage, thinking of you as if you were young. It is raining heavily, it is cold in the middle of the summer, like the day you died.

Your ridiculous, beautiful and small shoes, nobody wants them... they are as useless as my old beautiful books, I am throwing everything away and growing like a weed in the heavy rain...no longer your scented flower Jasmine, I am a weed, an efficient weed however, doing the job from the dark side of beauty...

July 17th, 2000

Yesterday a man I knew died...He died with love, in bed with his wife kissing him. I felt guilty for not kissing your last breath away from death, but my friend pointed out to me that you only do to a husband, not to a mother.

I cleaned our garage, cupboards, suitcases: Mother, you simply kept everything. As if on a stage, I saw all your costumes, I remembered them from our lives, when I was a kid, you young, growing fatter and older...Your empty clothes were waving yesterday and making sense as words, as if you spoke to me again and when I gave them away I felt like I was killing you...getting rid of you...Did I have any other choice? What do other people do with the clothes of dead people? Some keep them forever and talk to them, others throw them immediately away. Your clothes were the stage of history , that of my queen... my absolute ruler, but I overthrew you by destroying the monuments, the stage, the history...And now I am in power, I guess...Crying but still ruling with a firm hand...

I just wanted to phone you; I thought you were in the mountains with my father and my daughter. After all these months, the truth slipped my mind as in the very beginning.

If one can forget such a fact imagine how much we falsify and reinvent in order to go on.

July 18th, 2000

I heard a song by Pat Boone...Your music and your cozy, pink, protective world of protection overwhelmed me. I used to listen to your music and dance imitating your moves. After you went to work, I would put on your fancy underwear, your high heels, listen to your records and feel big and beautiful...

20th, July, 2000

The man who died two days ago had his funeral with jazz and crowds of drunk laughing people. Yours was sad, with classical music and without people. He wanted it that way, you wanted it this way and we, the families obeyed and behaved.

Mother, I cannot give away your things, not old shoes, nothing, I just move them from car to your flat to my flat and back to the garage. Please help me, you were always so good at putting chaos into order.

July 22, 2000

Eight months.

Bold tenderness, the way to handle the day with softness, decision, pleasure and success, without being visible or intruding and yet winning them all. Friends or foes, those who wanted you and those who didn't. That is Matrimony that I am spending now, keeping Patrimony intact: Patrimony cannot buy Matrimony, but without Matrimony no Patrimony can be made.

July 24th, somewhere in Greece, on the road

The way you folded towels, the way you put a dish in front of the one you love, the way you put your body in the matrimonial bed.

The violent fights you had with my father over the Way the One Does Things In Holidays. Usually you won over the details, unable to enjoy the victory in utter exhaustion. There he is now living alone, but his life is not his life anymore, it is yours, made up of those every day simple things.

Athens, 25th July

I know why you hated family holidays, they were like a public show or trial of family life.

In that kind of life Matrimony is all we have, or at least the first thing we have.

I was His soldier but Your kind: the big lesson of your death is this identification with you in anonymous matters.

In every moment of weakness quick images of you alive, insignificant details like icons : painful as knife stabs. At moments I feel I am losing control, they are like epileptic attacks, I never knew I hoarded so much of you : a painful treasure you are.

July 29, 2000

I am growing... God knows how fast and why that fast: my limbs ache as those of a kid growing in sleep. Why do women grow up completely only after their mother goes?

July 30th, 2000

Corfu night

All night with you in the same space; different yous: young, middle aged, old: dressed in yellow, green suit, black evening dress... you springing from everywhere, or just sitting back in a corner...it is not nightmares, I have no name for your return to me. I am happy, I embrace you, speak to you, I even argue with you but I cannot leave you: I cannot wake. I know that we cannot be in the same place forever, this is our safe space.

July 31st, 2000

Cora nights: I am in Saint Stephen, an island where my grandfather fought miserable wars as the Serbs do, fighting them with decency and ridiculous courage as decent Serbs as he was usually do; a rich and a good man, with a family, a business and the domestic tradition of cultivating land and people. Why on earth did he come to Corfu to conquer it with the French and then be put in quarantine as a sick crazy Serb that he became in the meantime? He probably didn't know he was conquering it, he had different words or ideas, if anything other but blind patriotism. But today in history manuals here in Corfu, they call them conquerors; I do not know whom to believe, I do not believe anybody anymore after all these wars I survived. Because at the bottom of every ideological lie you can find a different truth. He sang me a song, my grandfather Kosta Stefanovic, a landowner from southern Serbia and a shoemaker: he sang to me: Tamo Daleko, Far Far Away, Is my Serbia, Tamo je moja Srbija. Here I am, far far away, my heart is sinking, thinking and

singing every night of you, Mother, who told me all these stories, without being pathetic and to whom now I cannot tell my stories and impressions. You wouldn't have loved them, we always disagreed on everything, especially my stories about you, but you had the passion to listen, to disagree, to know of what I was speaking...Nobody seems to have that kind of passion for me anymore. Why should they? people have their own mothers, their own obsession...I dream of you every night, it is exhausting me; last night again a manifestation was telling me where to go the next day and share it with you the night after...Giving orders like Hamlet's father.

I remember Strindberg and his hallucinations, and how when reading him I thought he was crazy but an interesting writer. Now I think the opposite, he wasn't crazy at all but also not so interesting.

As time goes by I have a feeling that I might be writing about things I never dared write before, and not only of you: forbidden things. The decision to come out is related to your permission to come out, to move the world on. You are no longer a restrictive physical presence. Your ideas have always been greater than your small weak body: your premature and dignified death is the proof of that.

I am hungry and sleepy all the time. I do not drink or talk or rejoice except in sleep. I dreamed of eating your bean soup. The taste is lingering in my mouth; in my sleep I am with you, in a trance. If I belonged to some other culture my trance would probably have a name. In my western language I am finding my own way in the dark...

Dusks and sunsets, where you can be found...August the 3rd, the date of death of my grandfather, many years ago, but a date on which I never forget to feel afraid.

August 1st, 2000

Today I will think of fathers, rather than think of us two. The nights have been very heavy. All the excuses I find to mourn you! To identify with your pain, to feel guilty...Last night, for example I dreamt of my unborn brother, he was thirteen, he was killed in the First

World War as a hero and his pictures were hanging all over old town Corfu. His face didn't resemble any face I know, and yet in my dream you were heartbroken and I too. I always hated my unborn brother, your son: I guess when I tried to imagine him, he was a little bit like in my dream: he was young, dark and short and impertinent, as you were. Maybe with your big blue eyes and a sharp tongue, weak but bold, pretending to be daring but proud, what a fake he would have been: a male monster of all the best of you...Like your brother, dominating you, exploiting you, ruling you as a weak, vice ridden creature. Now, you would have liked that boy of yours, more than you liked me, I guess, and my Father would have adored him because he would be a man, but would prefer me, because I am of his kind. But my unborn brother would have bonded with Father instead of you. I know how you considered men: an unnecessary bulk, physical and emotional, after they gave babies to us women. You used to say, a woman never knows with whom she might spend the night: who will dawn on her...It is a necessary risk for the baby's sake, a lottery one must bravely risk. You were not so unlucky and yet I know how afraid you must have been...You hardly knew my father, who was not really violent but pretended to be. You did not want to really know him before spending the night and making babies; afraid that thinking might make you change your mind.

Now, the bulk of my tender and weak Father-bear pretending to be Violent and Authoritarian, you carried with a lot of patience and superiority. In the later years of your matrimonial life, you actually abused him and his love and dependence on you: you insulted him, mistreated him, controlled him and refused him. It was a deliberate breaking of rules in order to make him suffer. The performance of the family was over. You wanted to unmask the actors, to show us all how you made it all happen, the art of pretence: la commedia dell'arte. And Men were of course, the biggest asses, in your script. I felt sorry for the deposed kind of my father, in your cruel prison. But all those years ago I felt sorry only for you and angry that you never did anything to change if not break the rules of his domination and male pretence...You just avoided him on daily basis, taking him as much you could and leading a secret parallel life with me or on your own. And you did seem happy; you actually had a happy life, good husband and a princess daughter. It is the pretence that made me unhappy...That is why you hated holidays, because his domination fell on us and he took away our secret invisible women's life: the one he never knew existed or wanted to know of.

Granny left me all her jewels and other relatives did the same: because I was that Matrimony branch of that Matrimony tree everybody wanted to continue in Mother's big family, even the men, the Brothers, the Sons, the Nephews, all boys since I was born...even they were proud of me and my Matrimony line.

When you were dying, Mother, they came to offer everything for that continuity to me...never before did they offer and I had to accept it, as the only female heir to Matrimony...But it is a pleasant crown and responsibility...I have to think back in order to understand the codes, to make history visible. Hardly a woman doesn't have this crown, but sometimes they do not know it. Even my dead cousin who pretended to hate me until the very end gave me her share of the crown with words: I had it all, I have beaten you, but you are the only one left...And that was true. Women know such things, it is the Men that comprehend only after it is too late and they are caught in traps of wars and violence and death, with us, their women, as victims...But that is Patrimony, I do not want to speak of Patrimony, Matrimony is my line...

August 2nd, 2000

For many years I've have been fantasizing about this day as the potential date of my death. This year I have no feelings whatsoever, you died unexpectedly, you never knew November 22 would be your date, so I guess my fantasies are as ridiculous as those of a teenager saying, I will die young. Measure of death, yes, your death is my measure...Now my daughter said years ago to me: I will read your book one day but only after you die. You, Mother never wrote a book, just notes, prescriptions and cake recipes. I find them everywhere, in your pockets, purses, I am using them with passion. I even found some old worthless but big money that you put aside, God knows for whom, sure not for yourself. You didn't care about money or material value. I remember you once paying to a fisherman ten times the price, by mistake, making a fool of yourself, a woman who doesn't know money or the price of a fish...But you did bake that fish very well.

The money was the amount of your monthly pay, tidily put into an envelope, and put inside a new napkin...If only you could foresee that 18 years later I would find it. Some phone numbers I found too, of my friends ... You needed to know something about me because you were an emotional child abuser...No blame, even now that things cannot be changed. I was smart enough to let my daughter go and to make at least different mistakes as a mother. We two, well, we are stuck here forever in my dreams, on this sheet of paper. We are a story and an archetype, too late to become wind.

Turns of nasty hate against people I hardly know or know too well to hate: it is you again Mother, you did that and I never could pardon you, or those basic instincts. Those are turns of an unsatisfied, possessed woman. But why am I so?

August 3rd, 2000

A bat got lost from its flock this dawn and was screeching and blindly hitting the trees in front of my balcony...it was a painful sight...Nobody likes bats but I was never afraid of them. I remembered how my mother, compared to an animal was a bat or a woodpecker...she had big ears, long waving arms and loved to hang upside down, as a kid and as a grown up woman. I remember her doing it from her bed and laughing, together with us kids... She was playful, mischievous and immature, very often. She liked to play with kids, tease them, and be stroked by their small hands on her back. She was tender and cruel, as one of us...She came to visit me, as a bat, I hope she eventually made her way back to her flock...

My old feeling of being an outcast, of being different, of being an alien, the one I sensed as a 4 year old child in a mystical crisis...when I acted in order to draw attention and tell you, Mother, that I wasn't the one you thought I was and yet, I didn't know who I was... Well, that feeling comes back very frequently since you are gone. It never abandoned me, but during your lifetime we could fight over it, I would try to prove to you who I was and you would fight me back. But you listened, you had a child and you were interested to know about her...My father never paid attention to me being an alien, he didn't mind, you did...But, nobody else wants to understand the inner unique me, I am taken in bits and pieces as I am needed , never as an integral creature...

Your will was forced, every day by other bigger and more violent wills...Your strong pinching will was forced back inside against its own flesh and you never knew how to cry outwardly. Once or twice you cried in front of me, but I knew you should have cried much more....

Today is the anniversary of my grandfather's death, your father's, 27 years ago...I already had too many feelings and images about it: Now, I am here on the spot closest to what I know about him, wondering how to get in touch with the things I do not know ...Maybe all this Matrimony will pass as a phase, as a useful, or useless but unavoidable phase of growing...

By making my own family, randomly, as my belonging to Matrimony is, I am reconstructing your path, blaming you , but certainly from a different perspective...

We, the family, were a triangle: seven possible relationships. The conflict was never clear, always shifting. You deliberately confusing things, in order to hide, to hide us from each other and stay all together in some kind of story without beginning or end.

He and I, we do not have conflicts, if we do we resolve them in five minutes, because he cannot stand conflicts and I win. But with you in between, the conflicts were beautiful, as Greek mythology, as Greek philosophy, as Greek drama...

This is sickness, Mother, I was half-awake and yet I dreamed, of you: sick, dying, but not yet dead, there was still hope, for a day or two maybe, but also forever ...And I was happy.

August 4th, 2000

Matrimony is a black hole: a terrible place where terrible things happen: Dante described that black hole in his Hell, he spoke of order and justice and punishment That is exactly as life order is, slightly corrected by an artist and his political beliefs. But nobody yet described Matrimony as a Whole, because as a Whole it is a Hole and whoever there enters never comes back to tell us about it. Some crazy women in the attics, women tied up in the basements, mermaids, molested children, harassed sexual minorities and some Queens like Nefertiti and Cleopatra, or artists like Sappho, scientists like Hypatia...

The look you had in your eyes when something was pulling you to the Other side of Life, to Death of Matrimony, was a look of utter despair but not of Fear. In your eyes I saw that loneliness and despair of a little girl who never managed to grow up and rule at least her own life, but only pretended. I saw in your eyes pleading to sit next to you and lie next to you, this lack of command or pretence that you could make it on your own. I saw it only once before when Father was dying and you couldn't behave as a grown-up with me but asked me to take care of you. And I did. Those dying beautiful blue eyes, like this sea in Corfu, were an essay on lack of power, on how women become nasty. Because they lack the power to become good and rule at least their own lives and the lives of their dearest...at least daughters...if sons get kidnapped by the society while very young and educated as warriors or castrated as singers...I remember how you told me how Father humiliated you only few a days before you got your stroke and went to bed forever. You were walking with your stick, moving with pain step by step towards the living room; taking hours to get to the sofa where you had guests. And you overheard his last words whilst he was sitting with his back towards you: the big man sitting with his small woman leaning on a stick but guarding his back as an angel. And he said: but do not mention it to HER. Now that impersonal HER, SHE, THE ONE, THE ENEMY, THE WOMAN, THE LACKING, THE POWERLESS, THE CRAZY, THE WILD...THE WITCH, HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL...this impersonal HER offended you even more than the very secret

he had to convey concerning money, for which you never cared, but only used, to rule in tiny bits of life, in crumbs of power given to you by the Men.

Now this is your case Mother, I am your defense lawyer appointed to you by the law, by the government, by the black hole of. I never got along with you, or approved of your ways; I didn't even like you much. Sometimes I even felt nausea at your touch or smell. I could swear you felt the same towards me without daring to express it. But I loved you and you must have loved me a little bit. Even if it wasn't too much, it was enough for me to feel all the love in the world and learn how to pass love on. And what is most important, notwithstanding all this, I understood you better than your husband, than your friends or lovers and that as such I have to defend you: you are my Dreyfus case. I will die for the honor of the wrongly accused on the basis of biased, even though you do not want me to do all that I am doing. What's wrong with you Jasmina, my daughter? Why are you doing all this, exposing all the intimacy of the black hole of Matrimony in which all women live and perish without blaming or complaining, in impotence to change the world. Will you change at least your life if not the world? Maybe, I feel a dim light of hope... I cannot stop loving my men or all those lovely Gods...No, something else is at stake here in my life, in your life, Mother: we are fighting as in a civil war, us two. Or an internal matters affair. You dead, me alive, the situation is a little bit unfair but I am not sure for whom, you or me.

I saw the dispossession of a life inside Matrimony, of your life with your consent: as if you were circumcised. You cried a little bit in the beginning ...

I saw it happen to me, not once, but twice, even though I tried my best to prevent it, had much more power to do so, but still it happened. Exactly as it happened to you, with the same harshness with the same tenderness. The position of the woman in Matrimony when married is that of a hole, a black hole. ...Speak back to me, Mother, through bats, through random encounters, through dreams... All this is going on just to come to a close. The greatest pain can be overcome only by living it to the very depth.

August 5th, 2000

Not much to say today, a sort of emotional emptiness that feels good, the same old bad Jasmina you didn't like much: a spoiled, insensitive brat who has taken the rude, harsh Herzegovina genes from her father...

I was in the Achilles Palace-Museum built up by Sissy, empress of Austria who took the husband of her sister, traveled inappropriately, and her lost baby girl, while her son committed suicide because of love; the Mayerling case. This Sissy has your eyes, those of a monkey ready for any mischief but trapped in a life of a true lady...I wish I knew more about your love life...even with my father...I only wish I talked to you but actually we both avoided it...

A few months before you died, my father insisted that you should get new false teeth, because the old ones were worn out. But they are still okay, why should I waste money...and I will die soon enough...Now, ever since he was 40 my father reasons that way, if he should spend money on things which will last longer than his wasteful body. The philosophy of waste, the economy of a self-made man and the pedagogy of a father leaving a Patrimony to his heirs. The same words from your mouth sounded differently: you could spend enormous amounts of money on beautiful things, useless, and spend none on useful, necessary ones...both with the same reasoning, that values are not measured by money. When we burned your body, it was your eyes I was missing forever, not your golden teeth; this sounds terrible but it isn't perverse, if I could only have kept your eyes in a bottle, that would have been my greatest Patrimony, the Eyes of a Secret: there must be religion that permits the pagan rituals of Matrimony, it's time for us women to invent it.

August 6th, 2000

Such a lot of anger and impotence I threw into this sea here in Corfu, you were the poison that made me sick.

August 8th, 2000

I just came back to Belgrade and your voice suddenly rang out from my answering machine, saying the most ordinary things in the world. I do hear your voice often, not only in my sleep, and it says the most ordinary things in the world, with melody, with attention, about my daughter, about food, about duties: the cake will be out of the oven in half an hour...it is windy outside, wear a cap... This is an old message and your voice is no more, as you are no more...No it cannot be, how can something as solid as a woman and a mother disappear all of a sudden, for good?

I must preserve your voice, our small talk as a reality: that is exactly what is at stake without you.

When I overcame the emotion, I wonder which coincidence made your very old undated message fit in between two very new ones of the living: that of my father and that of my daughter. And all three of them speak of the same ordinary things: they fit as theatre props: they speak of a timetable, of calling back a friend, of a meal. Maybe life is not more than a repetition of the same old things, but we do not notice it because every time we say or do them we feel different.

Or, on the contrary, maybe life is a divine pattern, superior to our understanding, where my dead mama comes back to comfort me with her voice.

August 9th, 2000

The contempt that showed in your face, seeing my Father's big fear before your little death, must have been loneliness. He dared not come into your room. I guess that was exactly your marriage, and that is what is left of your marriage today, of Matrimony. Him giving away your things, him surviving shamelessly, him speaking of you as if you have been dead for ages, him using two young women in your place, him eating my daughter and I emotionally instead of you. Not that I blame him, not that I judge him, I love him, I want him alive at any cost, he is my last bridge to you and our times... It wouldn't have been that way if you survived had him. I can imagine that life, we lived it so many times

with him dying, threatening dying. Faking death, emotionally blackmailing and surviving us all without a tear of pity... I wonder about the price of staying alive under certain circumstances...I wonder if I am as lonely in this world as you were when you had to go so alone, as a true lady, with a nurse in uniform, a frightened husband behind the door, a superficial daughter who never told you what she really thought and a nice granddaughter whom you set free...not to face death so young...

When my daughter was a small girl she expressed her love to me thus: You are my husband and I am yours: when I grow up we will get married.

Is that matrimonial love?

I never proposed marriage to my mother, but you Mother did believe that we were married and could never get divorced: you took my husbands as if they were yours, my children as yours, you trespassed all the boundaries of decency.

Is that matrimonial love?

You said to me, just have your babies with any men, they will be our babies. You wanted thus to have babies with me.

My daughter as a little girl also said: and I will make many babies and bring them all home to you mama.

Is that Matrimony?

Is it wrong, is it perverse and why does Patrimony or patriarchy sound right and yet we women and men feel that it is so wrong...

When my daughter was even a smaller girl and when she wanted to be a bad girl and used foul language she would say aggressively in Latin: Mater, Mater, Mater, meaning to offend the Woman/Mother/Her Mother/Me/ Her Love for Her Mother, a same word that actually means and denotes Mother.

Is misogyny in language the root of this world? Where good and bad things are expressed by the same words?

Father is cleaning your house in the mountains... he is giving things away: to anybody, everybody who can wear them. Nobody can, so he gives my things. He is giving it all away, even though I am still alive, he wants a life anew. I do not blame him, it is a civil death he is going through. Why then am I collecting your stuff as if you were still alive and one day you may need them, or as if they were the clothes of Marilyn Monroe the day she committed suicide or of Queen Elizabeth the First when she ordered the execution of Mary Stuart. I am collecting the stuff Father is hysterically disposing of and piling it in my small room. Then the stuff produces swarms of moths and we all live together happily ever after.

Matrimonial line doesn't necessarily go forward. Backward it goes too with the same meaning because it grows in spiral circles.

August 10th, 2000

I was lying in bed, detached, and during that moment, between sleeping and waking, when and where the most incredible and yet true things occur, I suddenly sensed deeply my childhood that was cut by your attitude that childhood is a serious matter, actually an adult matter. (You used to tell me all the time: you are a big girl Mina; nowadays people tell me, you never were a child and when I remember being a child I remember not wanting to run, to cry, to get dirty, to laugh...as children did.) It was a sharp and sweet sensation of being safe, serious, responsible and beautiful: everything had a higher and lower sense at the same time. But it also had the somber shadow of your favorite dress, or dresses, the yellow and brown dress I chose for your burial. It also had the tone of your calm and melodic voice: it was as true as my whole life and your whole deed, that of giving me life and helping me grow up.

August 11th, 2000

But I had very stern eyes too: I became your mirror, more stern than you, more moral than you, more just, more rigid, all your faults became my fanatic values...without cognition or thinking, as an inherited, unspoken, interior Matrimony code...

I was four; I had a serious face, pretty as a baby, serious as a nun. I refused to wear the clothes you wanted me to. I refused to eat, any food whatsoever, I refused to play with other children and I refused to go to kindergarten. And I wasn't autistic, we both knew that, only a fanatic child with a strong, unbreakable will...Did you really want that kind of a child?

In the courtyard they considered me a queer child: haughty, spoiled and grown up. The way I dressed was crazy more than extravagant, yet all the other children envied me. But when we danced or played hide and seek, or valley ball, I was no longer odd, I was really good and my fanaticism would win over them all and win all the games...I would make up all the rest in one game and become a leader, a leader without a cause...

I see that picture clearly and how you actually made it happen: from inside, nurturing the strong line of fanaticism in me, the one you inherited, becoming a Stalinist to die for a cause, became fanaticism without a cause in me: that of an artist?

You supported the artist in me by ignoring it and saying all the time that it wasn't possible for a person to be only an artist. But when I did become a failure in everything else but in art, you were proud. Actually, like those mothers who hid away their children during the war, that they survive, you hid and supported my talents, disguising me as untalented: I thought I was a failure until you died, but now I know I was meant to be a failure in order to write this book.

I remember my stern look as a baby and yours softening in front of mine: I was melting your iron face, and finally when you were dying you had the beautiful sea coming out of your eyes, that sea you always kept hidden, as a secret that made you beautiful and vulnerable.

August 12th, 2000

Why did you like wars Mother? Why did you fight them? All the time that I have been thinking and writing on mothers in war and how they behaved differently from fathers in patriarchy, I must have had you in my mind and yet to put it bluntly: you fought all the wars, in your head and in your reality. Your war, the communist war, I understand, it was against Hitler, against Fathers, for idealism, that was you... but why all the other wars in your head, especially the last one in Kosovo where you wanted to send me to fight it. You said: if I wasn't so disabled I would have gone down to Kosovo to defend...and some of your doctor friends, women, did. Why do women like you who fight men and patriarchy to preserve Matrimony as a stronghold against men's violence and madness then fight Men's war for holy territory or loot?

You used to say to Father: don't worry when things take a bad turn she becomes good, I know her, she is my daughter. He would shake his head; he couldn't make distinction between important and unimportant events, as all men subject to a complex of absolute rule. But women such as you were had the complex of omnipotence, of having to control even the rulers...So you would pretend you knew what was going in my head and I believed you, you had the power of making me believe that you knew me better than I did. Most people try that game, it is a cheap game but you succeeded with me, without being cheap.

Things did take a bad turn, wars came and I didn't turn good, which for you meant, I didn't fight the wars, but I did take care of you both, without much understanding, on the contrary, reprimanding you for supporting those wars, for carrying on your old wars over our backs...

As my granny selling tobacco to the enemy soldiers to save her babies from hunger I sold my words to all of my family safe, you included, but you never gave me any credit for that.

Mother, I am trying to understand why you risked my life for your ideas, what kind of Matrimony is that?

August 13th, 2000

All the unfair and unhappy love stories seem a grain of sand in the sea compared to the misunderstanding and ingratitude I showed to you. Your great giving was misunderstood, underestimated and mocked by my arrogance as the princess that you made me. Of course you did everything wrong except for loving me unselfishly, maybe that was wrong too? Whenever I love unselfishly - and I do not even know how to love otherwise - I feel that I am doing wrong to the object of my desire, and to myself. I always stop and retire because I am afraid of the unhappy tragedy that follows...But not anymore, the black hole has got hold of me, I cannot stop. The depression has overcome me, after all these months, and I know it has your name: I know it is normal, I know it is mourning and I know I am at a point where I am losing touch with everything but my pain. I also know I should come out of it, but I am not forcing my hand to part from yours.

August 14th, 2000

Sick people are asking me for therapies, for medicines. I am not a doctor, they know it but you were, Mother, and since I never wanted to follow your orders as a doctor I had to learn your trade in order to disobey you. So now I am some kind of alternative doctor but I do use your knowledge. This morning your voice rang in my head saying something useful for a diagnosis I was supposed to make for a sick girl; you used to say, after a bacterial infection very often a viral one comes, and the fever rises. And you used to say, as a professionally-trained doctor, I can say that the growth of teeth in babies has nothing to do with fever, but as a doctor who has practiced I know it has, don't ask me why. Well my motto is, don't ask me to explain: I write and don't question it. What I say, don't ask me for an explanation, when I make a diagnosis, don't ask me why. I just know, and your right is to disagree and be treated by somebody else.

August 15th, 2000

Mother we are using your flat, giving it away to foreigners, you are not objecting. My father and I are just like that, we do not care about the things you did: towels of one's own. I miss your repression, it was intimacy...

Today an old lady of your age but not of your beauty said: I saw you on TV, I loved your speech and I replied, thanks, my Mother didn't. I keep hurting you with truths that are not true. My speech on TV was given when you were actually dying, it was good because you were dying, radical and emotional, and because I knew you were too sick to criticize me. I told this lady: mothers love other people's daughters and she said, yes, you are right, my daughter would never say the things you did and it is my fault.

I spoke on TV about those shady unreliable categories of mothers and daughters.

I do not think I should write this anymore, it is just a struggle to accept reality: you are no more. It is stubborn and boring, no topic for writing, every now and then I try to write about something else in order to mitigate the pain and seduce the reader but it is no use, my talents are failing, my pretences fading, my motives disappearing.

I am changing and I am not sure I like the way I am changing, I am retreating more than changing, to an old woman, to a defeated woman, to a weak woman, to a woman blackmailed by love and solitude woman. You would have loved me now because I am just like you, no more wildness in me. And like you, I am trying to hide it from my men who made me that way, but unlike you, I am not sure I will survive this disgrace and unhappiness, because I know better, because I lived better, because I am just defeated, not lost. I am the unlucky generation that had to catch up with bad turns of history. Angry, I am too.

I feel you are drifting away from me, or is it I who am drifting? You will become just a decoration, a detail, a precious antique image, is that what memory is?

August 19th, 2000

I didn't mention you for days, and I didn't think of you. I slept, I was okay. I had to do it and I will have to do it even more in the future. The cruelty of this gesture drives me crazy. The cruelty of the medicine makes me sick.

I am in your house in the mountains: I refrain from crying, I know the rules by now.

While driving the car I sang. And the children said: stop ruining our song. That is exactly the way I hated your voice, one of the finest I ever heard in my life, with absolute pitch and that whistling sound as an errand boy in Rome delivering bread at dawn.

My daughter is being turned against me by those who envy us and our bond. They have succeeded in separating us, too, Mother; death didn't part us, but the world as it is, always against two women who should support each other. I attacked from the front I was willing to make an enemy of my mother, as the world asked me to, and give my oath to the men's world. Now I am fighting against it, from the rear, as a mother. I have to be sly and cautious. I feel like a spy working for my culture and gender. Before, I was a traitor to it.

August 20th, 2000

I brought your coat from the mountains to my flat in Belgrade, at forty degrees C I was holding tight that coat as if it were your body. My dear Mother, call me the Mother Cupboard Cleaner, I am cool and professional: just call me and I will be there...

August 21st, 2000

This morning I had a clear feeling of how free you are now, I do remember the relief in your eyes and that blue look of pleasure: both kings and beggars have that moment. This morning I wanted to be as free as you and I wasn't afraid of death, yours or mine. I want to use this morning's knowledge not as a morning sickness or whim but as an I Ching well. I am drinking water from your death.

August 22, 2000

Another month has gone by...the usual August heat. Without you saying it, it is not so hot, we get used to it and do not bother to complain.

I imagine you alive, in the mountains with Father, or here in your flat now inhabited by my friends. I always imagine you ten years younger when you still walked and bothered to be kind to other people. But you became a cripple after that and your last years were really a swan song to normal life. You hardly moved, you hated everybody except your granddaughter and me, and you just sat in your chair and drank beer watching TV. You would then go to bed, next to your chair, and try to sleep, but you couldn't. Your life had become an effort to make your time pass quickly. You would cheer up with us coming to see you, but then you would turn back to your bitter solitude. I saw it happen to both my grandmothers and to an old aunt. But you were more bitter, your pain was more violent, your solitude aggressive, and your death close, close to my life...

As we cleaned the cupboards and distributed your clothes to those people you wouldn't let into your house for so many years, I wondered if you were watching us, and if so, did you close your eyes or just laugh at life and our petty fights. I do not believe you are watching me but I do watch you, and the you in me would laugh at petty little things in life and yet be angry because of how they work, as if they were important because life is made only of those petty little things. Even science, even literature, even religions...

August 23rd, 2000

Last night I slept at your house for the first time since you died: I slept in my old bed that became yours, after I went away for good and you took my bed as yours, my room as yours. Though you never liked my taste and you disagreed with my choice of furniture, once I went away you didn't change it. You just put your small body on my huge bed and had your peace. You were with me, as I was with you last night. I never liked your furniture but I will never touch even the grocery lists you left in your stylish drawers: so fancy but only small talk in them, not even a book, just notes and bits and pieces of secrets. Now when I think of it, maybe your secret was not to have a secret.

When I lived in Milan, new Italian friends used to ask me where I came from and I used to say from Serbia, but it s not Russia. And they would look at me saying: but you look so European, it must be because you grew up in Milan. Your mother must be one of those beautiful peasant women with black scarves round their wrinkled faces, their tender and suffering round faces. I would be so astonished I wouldn't even deny them. Then seeing you, *they* would be so astonished that silence would reign. Italians are deeply superficial. They would be astonished to find you also Italian, both ashamed and proud of being a Serb but Italian.

I was molded by those heavy hidden contradictions and now I am half Serb, half Italian, being at the same time neither of them.

Matrimony to all women in the world means that too: a Medea story, a vase full of somebody else's knowledge, a foreigner faking truth and only true in faking, a traitor to her men and a stranger to her children yet their biggest and truest love and support. All women are Medea, but only some burn their houses and children to revenge their Matrimony .

August 24th, 2000

Now, that was an abduction not a dream. Last night you just took me somewhere between your and my worlds and we couldn't separate. First I thought somebody was entering my flat while I was sleeping: a thief.

So I covered my head with sheets, a decision to pretend to sleep instead of waking completely and facing the conflict.

I heard steps and movements in the dining room, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, just next to my bedroom. They were gentle and of somebody who was relaxed and helpful: making coffee, closing the shutters to the sun. I decided to wake up and shout for protection but the Presence came up softly to my bed and lay next to me hugging me, before I dared make a move. Then the Presence softly caressed my arm with a tender breath over my ear, fingers through my hair...I wanted to move, I wanted to scream and I wanted to see the face of the Presence, no more afraid for my life, just for my integrity... But I could not make it, could not even open my eyes...And I suddenly saw, through the lids, I saw you in my bed cuddling me as if I were a baby, as if you were a baby...

I couldn't wake, I could look at the place you abducted me to, a house on the high rocks above the sea, in a city in the mountains: my phantom city.

As I write this, remembering all the details, a huge wave of pleasure overcomes me: I do not know why but all this tells me that one day I will be calm and happy and not to worry.

Now in my dream, in our room we started to live our new life: we talked a little bit, I tried to phone my daughter but the phone was dialing the wrong number all the time. I had to go to school in my dream and have an exam. I knew that I was grown up but still I worried for not having studied. After some time you were worried, too, for being there. At that point I realized that you, too, were on the lam. You were worried for not having your stuff, your life, only hanging on to me. Well, I guess in a way that was your life and worry always, the consequence of being possessive.

We both tried hard to make me wake, but I couldn't. So you said, okay just do what you have to do and pretend I am not here.

But my life was not my usual life, I was old but young and the space new and yet mine...Still a life it was, with you just as a doll, a dog, a statue...my product, my dream,

my guilt, my need...in the other room, behind the door, behind the consciousness, unable to set me free or set herself free...Beautiful and horrible.

August 25th, 2000

I drank a lot last night, exhausting myself in order to prevent you from coming during the night: for my and for your sake. And you didn't so we both had a long rest. I hope your sleep was as safe as mine was. I know you had problems with insomnia but that sometimes you would get through and be radiant in the morning. I am dumb and cool: the weather is not as unnatural as it was during the last few days of inferno when you came as thin air, as the heat, as a fata morgana, as an hallucination, as a sweet dream. Maybe you travel as a fireball, maybe that weather is the consequence of your death and all the other improper deaths – actually murders that occurred in the past years...I am happy that I was here and exposed to the heat and hallucinations, as I was to the bombs a year ago: I survived it all, I transformed and I grew, some people do it naturally, I need an imminent death threat in order to stay alive.

I am alone, physically, for a few days, as you were for years: I am living your life as a caricature, as a trial, as a change, as a challenge...and I am changing. I know you as this solitary but calm person, completely isolated, self-contained and self-sufficient. I am reproducing that state of absolute solitude. A religion, as a sickness...

I am trying your life as an experiment: a metamorphosis is visible in my face. I am shut down like a computer full of data to be used or not. Never mind, my words have lost their target, their impact, but my writing is only pieces of paper, a great sense of shame accompanies them: shame of being so stupid, so emotional, so direct, so useless, so writer compared to those who just remain invisible, silent, perfect and dead.

August 26th, 2000

Another night with the dead, you too. I was in the flat where I was born: it was full of people, all dead now except for some here and there whom I do not see anymore. A lunch

of rich food on the table, with silken tablecloth: my aunt, my cousin, you, my granny...my best loved people. I am hungry but I cannot eat... I cannot utter a word... There are some Arab people, some men who talk a language I cannot understand, they try to help me with food and words but I am afraid of them, I am paralyzed...

I am menstruating, I try to find in that crowded flat a sanitary pad, I find it and then I lose it somewhere. And I just sit on the toilet and time goes by. You come in the bathroom and I tell you, I cannot eat, I cannot move, I am heavy and I am menstruating...

As when I first got my period, you washed me like a baby, you found a sanitary pad, you put it between my legs (like a diaper), you told me not to worry but to walk normally and wash regularly. It is all okay you said, you will walk and talk and eat again...

Yes mother, it is just like that, as you said, I walk, talk and eat and menstruate, on my own, I am a grown up girl now...

What a fool I am: my life today has the same feeling and mess of love in a big family, but I am craving for the past and wanting to leave them all for a convent... I did everything to remake that family we had with its beauty and cruelty and now that I have it I want to destroy it because you, my aunt, my cousin, etc., are not here...

Mina you cannot be a child forever. I know, but you never told me that I was a child, Mother...

Last night at dawn I had a memory, a vision, of my first fata morgana I remember being a kid, in the heat of the desert, I saw our maid Nefertiti, from when we lived in Cairo, with a icy Coca Cola on a tray coming towards me. This maid, as beautiful as my favorite queen who I am still trying to write about (disturbed by your images, my private queen), was coming to help me out with the heat, not you...This maid was actually sleeping in my room, on the floor, not in her room in her bed, notwithstanding your strict orders not to do so and spoil me ...She did it, because she was a poor Egyptian maid taught to do so, but she did it disobeying your rules and following her heart because she knew I was a lonely child, an only child, alone with her parents in a desert...She sensed me, considered you a cold mother, that you took power away from me ... Even today when people I love most in my life scold me I lose my tongue...

Every evening you would dress up as a queen and go out with my father to the Pyramids; there you would meet friends, drink wine or beer and smoke cigarettes... Sometimes you would take me with you and I would ride horses or donkeys around the Sphinx, in that cheap but impressive tourist spectacle ...I hated it all and yet succumbed to the fancy monstrosity. I always believed that there were some slaves in chains living beneath all that glamour and that some day they would break the chains and slaughter us all, white people. I wanted to help them escape. I even organized groups of kids to find the dungeons where those people had been hidden for thousands of years...in an underground state. My mind was going wild with heat, social injustice, racism, classism...after all the communist rambling about sharing, nobody explained to me what was going on. When I saw some Arabs lords cruelly beating a young maid carrying a huge baby, you said nothing...When I asked you who those Arab people were to treat that girl that way, you said they have overthrown the King and now they are making up a fair world in Egypt. Yes; Tito, Nasser, Indira Gandhi, Castro ...those were the names of the fair world...

When my father refused to take me by car to my expensive school of rich foreign and local children, saying that I have to earn my car some day, I didn't understand why the other children didn't have to. Only the poor teacher of the rich children's school and I were on foot. The poor school teacher told me, because we are communists...

Anyway while hiking in the endless burning desert, to the Red Sea beach, I had the best experience in my life, watching the dust mountains follow the wind. I ran after them thinking, now I know that God exists, this is God...and when a woman died of heat in the desert, the mother of a friend of mine...I thought, if this is death, I am not afraid of it anymore, the woman was taken by the God of the desert...

The shapes and forms changing in the desert, the all the colors of the sand changing subtly in the heat, the tiny particles of the sand. That was eternity, cosmos, science and art. But I am not sure adults noticed any of that.

Before Nefertiti it was my aunt who took care of me, before my aunt my granny and afterwards it was my loved ones...

What did you do Mother when you were no taking care of your only baby?

You took care of other children, your sick babies, and you despised me for being healthy and joyful and wanting to share it with you after you came back from your work in tears because a baby was dying and you, her doctor, couldn't do anything about it. I would say, mama let's have a walk, and you would answer angrily : you healthy brat, aren't you ashamed to waste my time...and off you went to bed to cry... Now your hospital babies were ugly, sick, spoiled and parentless... and I hated them with all my heart. Sometimes on Sundays when you were on duty I would visit you with my father. What a horrifying adventure it was. My father never knew how to dress me, and he would oblige me to eat things I never ate in the morning, or would threaten me with horrible things in order to make me dress and eat the way he wanted... So I would arrive in absolute silence and fear at your department of leukemia and cancer where your babies thought you were their mother... How ugly those children were and you just radiated love towards them, behaving toward me as if I were your illegitimate child, or just a dirty secret we should both hide in front of your angels. You wouldn't hug me, touch me in front of them, not to make them jealous. And you would make me talk to them, eat with them...And they all shared you, between them, but not with me, the outsider claiming her right to be loved in health...

Mother you were wrong but I admire you for your courage to be wrong in that human way. Many women do it but pretend not to. You never pretended anything, we both knew you had to do it and that jealousy was superfluous but as real as anger or pain. I also love more those who need than those who need not. I also tried to escape from my baby most of the time because she was not in need. But with my baby you didn't let me make your mistake; you said, I did it and I was wrong, please do not do it with your baby, I was so wrong with my baby...Then, blushing you would say, my God Mina, it was you...Of course you were not wrong and you would do it again, you were just patronizing me and you knew I would never obey you... but you were also afraid to teach women to transgress...Matrimony invisibility school...

August 28th, 2000

Yesterday I was talking about a very hard period in my life: when I was left without money, without a flat, would a threat that my baby daughter will be taken from me. All of it a complete abuse of power. You were actually behind it: in order to make me behave

properly...You see, after all these years I have forgiven you, you changed your mind and reluctantly admitted you were wrong. I never really believed that you believed that you were wrong, you lost a battle but not a war. As with Stalin.

August 29th, 2000

My dreams have this quality of a nightmare that I begin to enjoy, they are real and they have new laws and dimensions according to which life is different, new and very amusing...less responsible and tragic...

And in my dream I had a big fire, big flames coming out of the walls, installations, my dream was on fire...

August 30th, 2000

I feel as if I were pregnant, pregnant with this writing of you. I am not much interested in anything else but bringing you to life you.

I closed my eyes, I am sick, I have a fever, I wanted to rest...and the smell of your funeral permeated like a newly baked cake. Your funeral, a party: a wonderful healing and happy memory.

It is the values that remain of one's life, values which become objects. When the body decays and dies, when it no longer breathes air in and out the and move and think and do and reflect the sun...then everything around it denotes the missing body. As in a negative film, the missing is visible through the present...The scenery of life becomes bigger but framed, finite...

Now that you are dead I am only half immortal, until my father dies too...

My father's voice comes to me often when I sleep. With the final words: Jale, umrla je mama, Jale, mamma has died. It was early, the phone rang, I was half asleep, waiting for

those words...his voice was between laughing and sighing, a thin voice, reluctant... but a female voice in my father. We did it decently, all of us...thanks to our gender, culture, whatever.

And Jale, that was my male nickname he always used out of love for his girl...when he wanted to scold me he would say Jasmina with a lot of sexism and harassment in his tone. But this male Jale always bridged the gap between his maleness and my femaleness. In crisis we lose the gender but keep the names instead.

As if time is running out of this sand glass, I am writing everything hysterically, secretive and devotedly...I said a year and then it will be over, I will move on, but I am clinging obsessively to words trying to stop time, especially in bed, when words and times mix. My sleep has become a vessel for this book.

August 31st, 2000

What a funny month August is, a the clown with the tears and heavy emotions...dreams again Mother...

I dreamt all night we were together in our life and death free space and you were pregnant: you had a five month tummy but it wasn't me inside, I was your friend, your daughter, you were my daughter. I took care of you, when I found out your condition... When pregnant with me you vomited, you even took an injection that usually crippled babies but at that time was given to privileged patients, as you were.

You have kept me as a secret so that nobody could claim anything about your sexuality...

Well, in my dream, I made your stomach public: my wish to have a sister or to have another baby...That wish doesn't cover any other baby but mine or yours.

September 1st, 2000

It is obvious that I am saying goodbye to images of my past, by making them come back with significance. I just heard the sound of your voice singing while I was watching an Italian spot... a stupid Pasta del Capitano commercial, your song of joy when living in Italy, where everything was sung; even the names of a toothpaste. As your voice rang, I said good-bye to Italy too.

What messy political times. I do not know what to think. I do not think you were right but I do not like these new guys and their ideas. They celebrate the ideas you fought and feared as cruel and dangerous. The whole world crumbling to pieces, maybe I will find my ideas among the rubbish, small ideas left out of big ideas gone bad ...

How can one take power and rule this ugly world?

Mother I have to tell you the news: Father just phoned me, your friend from the mountains died a few minutes ago. You two were the only ones who liked children and flowers in the mountains, always doing the gardening with great passion and devotion. He was a retired official of the secret police and he wanted to see me when I was in the mountains a few weeks ago cleaning out the cupboards, but I refused, because of you. So now he will be seeing you first. Matrimony is also your gardening, your friends: every relationship you had with flowers or men was colored by matrimonial devotion.

September 2nd, 2000

My father's birthday, the first without you: he is no husband anymore, he is a widower and he cannot get angry because his wife, you, the missing person forgot his birthday. He is really angry this year because you didn't make it to his birthday. He made a big party, he usually never made parties for his birthday; he used to say, I am not even sure the date is right: in those times children were not registered immediately. But I think you were behind that. You see, the fact is that you didn't follow birthdays because you never followed days or years... you would forget my birthday as well.

It is a calm birthday without you, I am becoming a calmer person in general, I am fighting like hell to keep calm and sane and I lost all of a sudden that permanent tension in my stomach: it comes and goes nowadays only when patterns of behavior or words remind me of you and your way of emotional thinking, which always made its way directly to my stomach.

Father and I are not rejoicing, on the contrary, without you all the fun of quarrels, problems, stomach pain, alcoholic relief, ups and downs is gone, your careless and haught sneer toward death brought about a feeling of eternity .

September 4th, 2000

Today is a very heavy day. Raining, we have no electricity, it is a hot dark rain as during the bombings more than a year ago: bombs, political fear and anger, love despair, anxiety.... I feel these pieces coming together in a different pattern. I even look different in the mirror: older and younger. My waist is not thin but my cheeks are, I look like an old young girl...

I may die in this shape if I die young enough. I will do better than you did in your age because I fought during my transformation. But finally with this heavy rain I can say: I am overcoming it all, you included, without regrets, and with very few tears...

I am watching TV: it fits into the clothes of normality, into clothes of reality: no leftovers, no shattered bits and pieces... reality perfectly fits every item of normality...

Postwar times here, but, you would fail to distinguish it, all wars being yours and none mine, and for you, wars never end.

You had your stroke watching the TV news on Kosovo, on how Serbs were abandoning their homes, after they won the war against NATO.

You never admitted defeat, you had a stroke with the words: you didn't conquer Kosovo, you cannot give it away. Some twenty years ago, the father of my writer friend, a Jewish

doctor from Kosovo, died with a similar message: take care of Yugoslavia, take care of Kosovo.

When you spoke of Kosovo on your deathbed I was jealous and sad. You didn't speak of me, of your granddaughter, you spoke of a territory you never even visited, and of monasteries, you who hated religion, as a true communist calling it opium for the masses...

The world is not settling for a better turn, on the contrary, we are poorer, sicker, older, meaner than ten years ago, even before you died Mother ten months ago. But my self control, self-esteem is back: I have this heavy experience over my back as a shield; a horrifying animal experience. If you expose yourself you will be shot down. If you are weak you will be abused, if you are good you will be destroyed... luck or maybe Matrimony?

September 5th, 2000

You would give me your life but never your approval for my life.

My cousin Biljana was born on this day in 1959 and died November 10th, 1998. I saw her being born and I saw her die. When I think of her beautiful face and generous personality, I wonder what happened between those two dates. She was an impossible, strong, artistic and self-destructive personality, and she had an intensive wild share of life...what bothers me is the hidden violence and cruelty I witnessed as the older sister. She was the bright, sensitive, wild child: the favorite child, she had it all, along with the violence toward those who have it all. Being a girl (she wanted to be called Without Ideas) she suffered a specific violence : that of a superior woman who doesn't give a damn about being superior. Everybody was in love with Biljana but when men started to talk to her they would either run away from her or beat her. The cruelty of patriarchy brought her early death, but the weakness of Matrimony made it possible. Biljana had her mother, my mother, her grandmother and me on her side all her life and yet it wasn't enough to keep her alive. I know women like her who survived, but rather miserably. On the contrary, she becomes a mystery, a story, a topic for guilt, for all of us who didn't protect her .

We failed to give her our approval; you never gave it to me, Mother, I never gave it to her. We had jealousy and envy running between us, all losers when it comes to Men...And they just took everything away from her because they could not stand the power she had, as they simply cannot tolerate the superior power some women have.

September 6th, 2000

I spoke to a former friend of your death. I used to love that woman but some time I stopped. I used to have a mother and in the meantime I have not. I was above the situation: she knew nothing of my former emotions, she detected something going wrong in our communication which was that I had nothing to lose, I was untouchable. She ran away from me in fear.

September 7th, 2000

Today is the date of death of Karen Blixen: an author I teach and I do not know the word, admire? Not really, I do not even know why I have her photo above my writing table, why I translated her books why I think of her life with love and hate...

Every year I remember the date of her death: this night too, comparing it to yours. My indifference is growing as my transformation becomes final. I am adapting to my new world, to my future: I found this new shape, I am thin as an old woman, as a young girl, my hair is fair, as that of an old woman, as that of a baby, my talk is simple, as somebody who knows too much or nothing. And that is Matrimony from Karen Blixen: it is her story that is now coming out of me, why she took me over many years ago when I didn't yet need her. That woman falsified her biological age and history and constructed a better reality, lived on champagne, virtual love and fiction until she died of emaciation at the age

of 77, listening to her favorite music. She could have been my mother, she could have been me...she was my Matrimony too: my spiritual Matrimony.

You shouldn't be jealous of her, Mother, or of her death: greatness is in the fact that you lived only for me, Karen Blixen's is quite the opposite. We are many, involved in the Matrimony relationship...but that is Matrimony too.

September 8th, 2000

I am inventing the word Matrimony ,day by day, as opposed to Patrimony, and every day it gains a new meaning, more removed to its original sense of marriage.

This is not literature, this is not your story, this is psychoanalysis and I am sorry for being so raw, but all ambitions have left me. I just want to feel good, to feel invulnerable as I used to when I was a kid, and when I thought mothers never die.

My ego is dead...I am everywhere, wherever it feels good, in living people or matter ...My ego was made of my love for you...

September 9th, 2000

Last year I was in Venice on this day at the film festival, and you were proud of me: you didn't ask to see the film, afraid that you might get angry. In fact, you were sure you would, you never liked my political opinions, but now the thing has gone too far: my success was not controllable, you had to put up with it. In my film you talk, you play the role of the silenced woman, wife, and mother who argues all the time, neglected. Your last role...

These days many of your friends are dying: news like pebbles... they slip my mind and emotions. Your house in the mountains, your garden, your neighbors...in a way it is all gone, as after a war. War it was Mother, not only ours. It was a war in our lives, in our

country, an invisible war for the most part of it, a postmodern war, a cruel war and we paid for it with our lives: part of our lives or all of them, as you did.

I see those empty houses like pyramids of a civilization I grew up in. I am also learning how to abdicate power in case I become nasty as you and your neighbors did, the generation that made this war happen. Not that you wanted a war, or death, but you didn't fear it, you had no mercy for those who didn't want to be ruled by you. So it happened: until the very end you thought your lot was invincible. I remember the look in your eyes as you were dying: it was a look which refused to acknowledge death modestly or reverently. I adored you and envied you for that attitude, but you were so wrong.

September 10th, 2000

The birthday of another beloved dead: this is the last year I will feel it, no longer will I torture myself with memories, a sense of guilt.

My aunt, a mentally ill woman, whose mother committed suicide and who twice tried to kill herself, was the closest figure to sanity I could think of, all my life, until she died as a mad woman in a mental hospital. She was intelligent, educated, rich and beautiful. She was also my dead cousin's mother. But they had my uncle for husband and father. He took their lives in his hands because he said they couldn't handle them alone and he sent them both to drugs and premature death. He was a doctor, he had all the credentials to be convincing. Now, Mother, I was a kid seeing that male violence, I knew there was something wrong with this uncle of mine, I avoided him, feared of him. But you? You were his grown up aunt, you could have done something. I know you saw it as well. Maybe from a different perspective, but when the two women we loved both started withering, you should have done something...Instead you blamed them for their weakness, for being victims. And even after they were gone, you didn't stop blaming them. I feel guilty, for your guilt and for their premature deaths, even though I promise I will stop next year. My mourning, my Matrimony will last only this year...

Do you want data, do you want arguments for my stories? You will never get them, Mother, the last one writes the history...and I am the last one who cares about us... that is the most you can get...

My dear Mother, I forgot to write your secret and mine too. I was also prude, possessive and a simple Serbian daughter of yours: my mother never loved anybody else but my father and I. Not true, she did, and that was her love secret. And my secret actually has to do with yours, if it weren't for my secret yours would have remained a secret. Why am I writing in English again...I tried to write a few words of you in our language, in my mother tongue Matrimony words and I felt sick...That language brings me bad memories and fear when I write it. It is the language in which I am judged by my loved ones, insiders, accomplice.

It is the language of censorship and self censorship. It is a patriarchal and Patrimonial language.

And since your secret will be in English I will write it: As a young communist, with a thin waist, tiny feet and big violet eyes, you hid in your house during the Nazi persecution of communists a famous, very handsome revolutionary. You fell in love with him and his ideas ...He was older and actually very mean and a womanizer. But he loved you in his way. That is probably why he left you. You were left with his love letters, poems, and a broken heart, ready to die, if not to marry the first man you met who didn't care about fancy stuff like love and emotions. And that was my Austro Hungarian, rational, clean, hard-working and honest father.

You married him and never regretted doing it, but you banned love from our lives, the romantic personal. Only political ideology was permitted. I can only imagine how good you felt living with your secret. It was as if having an affair, a parallel life without taking any risks.

Well this guy came back into your life one day. As an alcoholic, a secret police killer, war profiteer, communist big boss and abuser...all the worst you could get from such times. Abusing young girls, alcohol...My father, by some twist of fate, had to deal with him: he hated him, hated that kind of person, hated giving him money and credit but was obliged to

do so, by his communist country and by the silence of his wife. He suspected but never wanted to know the truth. Who knows what the truth really was?

After all, I am just a daughter and a fiction writer: a capital sentence for a mother and for truth. My defense, of course, is not the truth but the need to speak out.

September 11th, 2000

At midnight sharp I had a strong urge to commit suicide and fake an accident: one can fake in front of a daughter, she would readily believe it which makes it easier to live on, but you Mother, you would never believe it with your sense of guilt and duty even if it were true. Even if a truck struck me down against my will you would think it was my will and your fault. That's the way Matrimony works in suicides: it is a suicide in itself and doesn't let an accident to overwrite it.

But then suicide is such a rude and gross gesture: to leave behind your ragged lifeless body. Woman usually use make-up before doing it. I look at your photo at this point and I know you are alive, I never accepted your death. I embrace your shoulders and I give you a kiss. If I go away I will not be able to embrace nor you my daughter anymore. And there is no way of having you both now, you are in two different places and I am somewhere in between. What a shame.

September 12, 2000

The less I want to write, the more I write, I fear this farewell, everything from the point of view of an obsessive daughter writing seems important. Even my life becomes a stage, public Greek dramatic stage.

As I entered your flat today, to scatter the moths, save your furs, your old towels, rags - as you kept everything loving them equally, I felt very important, like a Cleopatra, or a Juliet. And very conceited: big actress that I am, I bravely entered your room, your death-bed, and hugged your shadow. I was ready to sit where you died, finally, and maybe even have a nap. I wanted to back my bed, my Mother, but I just hugged the shadow of your death, reproducing every second of it, even though I wasn't there.

Who bothers about joy once you get married and have children, you used to say, Mother. I do not know what that meant: did it mean that you didn't have need or time for joy, or does it mean that you got joy in marriage and children. I guess both, my answer to all dilemmas is always both...

September 13,2000

I am finding out these days that life doesn't stand still, that every movement of mine has a meaning, an impact, a reason and that it can give me joy...I am finding out that I am not invisible and that nobody wants me to be invisible. I am finding out I am not perfect but that nobody really gives a damn about it and that actually people are neither perfect nor pretend or crave to be such. I am finding out I can live forever and control my life. Mother, this late discovery is your deed. I was your little doll in your doll's life. Were you Nora, was I Nora, were we all Noras at some time of our lives? I still have the movements of a doll, my hands posed like a model in the window, a partial victim of the doll's psychology. But, I breathe and I am sorry that you are not breathing with me...

September 14th, 2000

I have this urge to have another child. I know the feeling, I know it comes when I feel alone, when I see no future in my spiritual work, when I feel the pain of lacking love...And I know now that without you it would be hell. You did abuse your Matrimonial power but you made it all possible. You cuddled me and convinced me that babies should be born and loved. Girls even more. My friend, whose mother died when she was a small

girl, said: I never missed her , until I had my girls. I need you now, Mother in order to have another baby: babies are not born safely out of Matrimony. I remember how I would wake up in the morning , beautiful days as these days are now, warm autumn's days, sunny and active, and cuddle my baby. You would give us breakfast and then off we went to the park, for the day. In the evening I would bring the baby to your home, take her to bed and then out to have fun and boast of my baby. A total circle of love: Matrimony, baby, sun...

All the hard work done behind the curtains, the cooking, the cleaning, the money, the worries, the insults, you took care of. I was in a dream you made possible for me. I remember you danced and never slept. Happy as I never saw you before. Today I will go and visit a pregnant woman who is about to have a baby: I must help her lose her fear and me, my misery. No need for her to be afraid, no need for me to be miserable, but women are never wise. They never know how to enjoy their small lives as big.

September 15th, 2000

Last night I finally opened the suitcase of my dead cousin. It has been lying around for more than a year waiting to be opened. I want to make a book out of her papers, as I promised her. I promised her a flat of her own, if she survived, and a book if she did not. She was equally excited at both options, she never had either of those even though she had some things that people usually do not have: beauty, intelligence, adventure...

An old-fashioned suitcase, a family suitcase, maybe it was yours, Mother, maybe your sister's. It had your family trademark. As I opened it family photographs popped out: it could have been my suitcase. Shall I do it? Is it worthwhile this Matrimony stuff? Her suitcase could have been mine, but only Part One of a life: the childhood and youth. She looks as I do, in our photos we smile together, we wear the same clothes, we read the same books We write the same verses, short stories, ramblings and works of genius...And yet she is completely different, she takes another angle: no pessimism, no sentimentalism, no depression, no banalities...She is smaller, sharper, prettier, tougher, yes, the better sister...And I am no longer jealous of that, she paid a heavy price for being an impatient angel. I am paying mine for being slow, jealous and selfish. After two years of ruining myself with emotions, I slept like a log with vivid dreams of she and I happy. I am lucky to have had her for 39 years. In the meantime you died, Mother, and I had to pack my

invisible suitcase, pack you away together, with my emotions too, and tears and move on. I look at myself in the mirror this morning and I am much older after the recent nights , months, years. I turned to my new life with my men and without you. In Biljana's green suitcase lies my life too, all those photos I had forgotten. My cousin kept me there, as I keep her photo on my piano. Two versions of the same life.

Such a small suitcase! She is transparent: her hospital records, her husband's. She knew she was sick a long time ago and kept it as a dangerous, irresponsible secret from me, who was pregnant, and all those who shared her life. My angel was immoral, I guess, she could have killed me, too, and my child ... Or jealous, or envious...or just afraid?

Did you know it, Mother, too?

In your family, to be sick was a shame.

No wonder I am stronger, because you two, my twins, you were my vice; I let you go at a certain point, and you left... I do forgive you, and you will forgive me for staying alive.

I am speaking about losing friends and kin the moment we lose our women's solidarity.

It happens when we fall in love, when we fall to vices or drugs, and it happens when we simply fall apart. And it is a fall.

My daughter will be free and wild, out of Matrimony in a dangerous free space for a woman. But she is a new kind of woman.

We sought truth, but we also lied to each other. I remember my cousin's face lit with eagerness to grasp the truth, and that light passing on to my mind, but when the artificial light of drugs broke our magic we started lying to each other with the language of the conqueror.

My cousin's fall began after we fell apart over her fall into love with a stupid and possessive man and into drugs.

She left for Amsterdam; she was living on the edge, between arts and drugs and big money, ending up in an international prison, arrested by Interpol. Losing it all; money, love, drugs...

I took her back, I took her to the mountains. I was pregnant, I wanted to talk and get her clean. I wanted her mind back, such a fine mind she had, one of the sharpest and most tender I ever met. And I wanted it all in a healthy body. One night I was awakened by a banging noise: I crawled silently in the darkness , I thought it was a thief. I saw my cousin banging her head against the wall, with trails of blood on her face...I took her in my arms and she cried as a baby. I know it is hard baby, I said but you will make it. Her blood was all over my hands, my nightgown, bed sheets...

One year later, in the same house, against the same wall , my stubborn baby started hitting her head in order to draw my attention. I saw a ghost, it still lives there, I am sure.

Biljana was also the victim of her love for art. She was too bright to have a body, especially that of a woman.

Art is lethal for those who do not create it, who do not consume it, who just appreciate its universality, totality... She was too perfect to be creative, she was the creation. Only the crude minded can waste their time chiseling and building that which they do not have. But she didn't know it: she wasted her perfect mind in crude business, mostly the business of men who had the strength and power and drugs to bring her down and make her feel gravity. Who could make her feel her body, forget her emotions, anxiety and thoughts.

I am here with Matrimonial suitcases and dowries. It is quite normal that you left it all to me: duties, mourning, pain, cleaning, writing, explaining...I am doing all the dirty work and I should feel privileged that I have the opportunity to do it. But you had all the fun, you bad or naughty girls.

September 17, 2000

I just heard that a relative of mine is having her third baby. I have a strange feeling that I am actually living with the two of you dead more than with my pregnant cousin, who talks to me, whose children I hold in my arms... Would it be the same if I were pregnant?

I just heard new politicians from the opposition asking old people, grandparents to vote as their children say, for their children, in order to live with their children...in order to have them around and not abroad...Mother you would never have given in.

September 18th, 2000

I dreamt of being kissed on my cheek, touched by a warm hand, and somebody whispered: I love you, come away with me...I wanted to abandon all ...Something tells me it was you again. We were a perfectly normal mother and daughter but this now seems a perverse love story.

September 19th, 2000

I am writing rubbish , my emotions are sloppy, I am distracted and bored at the same time... The elections and riots are around the corner and with them fear of new wars, new bombs, but this time , without you, it will all be different. I will be more responsible, less passionate, more bored, less afraid. Political passions without you: I have no enemy, no interior enemy, the one who makes you see. and your choices are winning anyway. Whoever wins belongs to your story. You are winning even dead, you who do not need anything here anymore and I am losing to the dead.

September 20th, 2000

I just heard of a woman writer of my age who died after you did. I remembered how five years ago I drank heavy red wine and after one glass I started crying because eventually some day you would die. But it could have been me.

Heavy remorse, a memory: I was in the USA five weeks and three days. My daughter phoned me, suffering because we are apart, but pretending to be grown up. On my return she said: the most terrible moment was when I would put down the receiver and know that for another three days I would not hear you. Dear me, I thought I was doing something fine, and you Mother you were suffering for her. All the years of her childhood you were admonishing me: I made that mistake, and I will always regret those moments I just threw away thinking that other things were what gave me happiness. Other things were other things, the first things were invisible.

September 21, 2000

I just heard a woman say: my mother gave me unconditional love, it worked for me and my family. Until she committed suicide when she was 61...

September 22, 2000

Ten months since you've been gone. It is raining and warm, you would have suffered this weather, this political turmoil, your loss of power and health all in one blow...Instead I have to deal with all of it as somebody who must win. When one gets close to gaining power, one thinks immediately of losing it: losing my health and power to these kids around me...Now we are all on the same side, in the same boat, but I cannot go on forever, we must split and individuate.

Fathers treat their women, in the contract of Matrimony in a patriarchal society, as Cattle. Women do the manual and heavy work. My father always expected me to be a genius outside in the public sphere and somebody who will do the most simple jobs for him. At

home to prove to him that he is my master. Today, when he asked me to obey him, ten months after you died, I just turned him down. He used you up and you went, now it is his turn to go.

23 September, 2000

Another feminine matrimonial cruelty. The cruelty with which a daughter, after she becomes a woman, refuses to be part of her mother's life. But I was allowed to do it in Matrimony. I told your secrets, interpreting them and judging them. You let me do it. Years later when my daughter stood up against my books as lies I thought I would not survive the blow, but I didn't dare scream or complain. In Matrimony you have to let go, in order to survive. As with a handicapped child, you have to handle the strings as if they are loose... and eat all the shit, if necessary, and stay silent. I wonder what happens when you have a boy, does Patrimony or Matrimony win when it comes to cruelty?

I went to your home today, by the time I was at the gate , I was you, it was exactly how you would open the gate, slowly and elegantly, and go to vote at the next corner. Tomorrow I will do it with him, as you did, with dignity, I will vote for my guy. Your times are gone, Mother, you are gone. At the moment that I was you, in the corridor, I remember you saying that you lost your wedding ring there, a ring that you bought for yourself many years after you were married but which you considered your true commitment. What kind of Matrimony was that?

I remember another story from my grandmother, your mother. The family had a set of old earrings. Every now and then somebody would lose one and the other would be turned into something else: a ring, a medallion. But every few years they would find the lost item and lose the other one. For decades it has been going on, even today I have only one...

September 24, 2000

I dreamt last night again that I was beating you with a passion that hurt my hand. You stood straight and didn't change any of your political opinions or orders. I felt impotent and started crying. Today I took my father arm in arm and we voted opposition: without you. He said, I want you to see I am voting for you not for your mother anymore. She was a very strong-headed person but with a beautiful heart. You are too cruel when you write about her. I guess I have beaten you, Mother, with this vote, I feel ashamed of myself because I am beating a dead woman.

September 25, 2000

I cannot believe what is happening, everybody has beaten their parents, dead or alive, and the opposition has won the elections.

Mother, you lost. I didn't think of you for 24 hours, nor dream of you, nor see you anywhere. Your guys who lost are not part of you anymore. You were my cruel angel, these are just bastards and farce of you. Glad you are not here to see me triumphant, but I do not behave as such. Without you I had nobody to defeat. Victories are measured by the greatness of enemies.

September 26, 2000

Again I dreamt of you as my censor: we were travelling together and you were telling me off: whatever I did it seemed a transgression , so I started transgressing seriously, in order to deserve my punishment. You did not notice the difference, and I felt morally lost. I dreamt we were on a train, in a compartment, you didn't let me open the window but you didn't react when I opened the suitcase and threw the stuff out...

Am I this kind of mother too? Putting unimportant details before universal values? Changing the universal values, confusing them...destroying the universe and making a prison out of it?

I understand now what a Matrimonial legacy means: when your mother dies and you enter her home, or your home, and it is as if she is still alive. There is no such thing as a dead mother, every mother is the bible for her daughter.

September 27, 2000

Mother , no time for you, I am busy cleaning your historical cupboard. I am throwing out your historical heroes: criminals and dictators and stern arid men who made your life but ruined mine. After this historical cleaning, after the end of Caesar, Nero, Stalin and Milosevic, I will be left with your story only.

September 29th, 2000

Now listen to this: I am wandering lost on a railway station in a big city I do not know well, it is not my city. It is a famous city from my dreams, it has mountains, it has the sea, it has trams and trains, and it has big and small houses, it has, in one word, everything. Well, that city is obviously my life. I cannot remember, in my dream, the name of the underground station where I have to get off or the street I have to go to, but I have to get back to some place where I left something important and intimate: a suitcase, a baby? Trains run over my head nearly killing me, I am an Anna Karenina who doesn't want to commit suicide...Finally I take a train, and use my instinct: I recognize names and places and I reach the place where I left my life...It was a nightmare that turned into a true gratification...

Mother today we are on the streets again demonstrating against your leaders, your ideology. You are not alive to worry, though you never worried about my life while you were alive, as mothers usually do, afraid of arrests, of their children being harmed the bodies they gave birth to and nurtured ...No, you were afraid of my wrong choices, and you wouldn't have minded if my body was hurt if that would to put my mind on the right track.

September 30th, 2000

Yesterday I met a relative of yours, an old sick woman as you were, bitter and angry as you had become, but still a very poor and bad copy of you. She has grown even more bitter and aggressive in this political situation in which she has definitely lost her social power. She said defiantly, as if ready to fight: you can kill me, now that you have won, you NATO traitors and killers. She was saying the same things to her daughter, to her grandchildren. A gust of uterine hate rushed through me, I felt as alive with hate as I used to with you around. I was glad you were dead for the sake of everybody's decency.

October 2nd, 2000

I am on the streets so much that I left our love letters for the sake of a new life without you. That is how it goes in all love stories (pain of death and death of pain) until all of a sudden oblivion comes as an immediate drug...

These days, I have images that could bring emotions and tears to my eyes, but I just dismiss them professionally ...

All those times you punished me I thought I was really wrong, because I was afraid of being right and getting punished for it: a simple psychological reaction of a human being . I see it also in the general political repression today: I am grateful to you for being my introduction to repression, I really loved you and I know you loved me, which is not the case in political repression, where one is only an anonymous object.

October 4th, 2000

You are everywhere and nowhere, like a missing person. Yesterday Father was behaving again as a spoiled old man, I guess he missed you too in his way...

My understanding of fear comes from the image of my father having a fit. He is a big choleric man. He was a commander who was always ordering his troops to retreat and shooting in the air above the targets. A choleric big frightened man. Well, this guy is the image of fear in my life. When I was very small, you worked on night shifts and he took care of me. But he didn't know how to do it without getting anxious, nervous and finally violent. The genesis of all wars. Then he would threaten me with his belt. I was four and trembling. He went through the rituals of spanking me for my own good: I had to take off my clothes, lie down and as he stood over me taking off his belt. But it never happened. I remember the household screaming. A good man with bad temper. And I remember him screaming at you and saying, I will hit you. He would never dare. He would die first. But my fear of big choleric men is rooted in this serious threat when you left me in his hands.

October 5th, 2000

I said I would write for twelve months, but life doesn't adhere to that kind of schedule, at least not my life, not here where wars, your wars never stop raging. I have no time to mourn you anymore, I am mourning myself, angry at having once again given in to your arguments, to your politics, even after you are gone. For not being strong and harsh enough to overcome my tolerance and tenderness. I am fighting on the streets for my sheer life and a little bit of a future, and I am happy you are not alive anymore. I couldn't stand your biased mind in this situation, your intrusion, all those bad sides of yours I tolerated so long. Reality and politics are dangerous, my internal and external enemies. Your president, Mother, must step down and let us forget him, if not kill him. If you did it, he must too.

October 6, 2000

Last night Mother, your president was overthrown by people in the streets. A girl died because of him; it could have been me, her name was Jasmina too. His parliament burnt, then his TV building of arts and lies you loved so much, with your flat standing in between them. I imagined how would it have been with you alive: tear gas all around your

windows, you allergic to it and without medicine, because of the sanctions, and your place in danger of the flames and people like me. As during the bombings when you closed the windows and ignored reality saying to us all, we will win, we must win. Well it was exactly as if you were there: your granddaughter had the allergy in reaction, your husband was frightened by the flames and the looters who were breaking into the flats, and I was on the other side of the barricade: fighting, writing, and worrying for the health of my enemy. But without you it was all easier: fathers are easier to fight back and conquer if mothers are not there to take their sides. As in an incestuous affair, power is what it is all about.

Good thing you were not there, again I must say it. My mourning is becoming shorter though that has nothing to do with true grief.

October 8th, 2000

I am so free and so transformed that I feel like a ghost: the horror of a dictatorship is now slowly fading away. Mother dear, your fading president is really behaving as you did when you realized you were losing your health and power. He pretends he is still in power ready to kill us all. But you were no killer, no stupid murderer as he is, you were my mother, yet his twin. A woman and my mother yet an ideological twin sister to a monster. Matrimony and Patrimony of my history.

October 10, 2000

My dearest Mother, today in your flat, all this political small talk without you there: I really missed you. Everybody is now spitting on our past, political and private. You would never have, you would have defended our past, our dignity. It was your ideology, your life, your choice, but it was my life too, even though I hated it.

My father wants me to carry him into a bright future but I do not have bright ideas. I have my sorrow, my sense for music and arts, and my crazy intuition, and all that makes me closer to you than to my father who wants a bright, concrete future and me to be his leader. I cannot follow any longer, neither can I lead ...

October 12, 2000

I am reading a book of a daughter remembering her mother as I am remembering you; I couldn't stop sobbing. It is a war, this mother/daughter love, so old, so unchanging and yet always original and unique. Even if I cannot prove it is new, Mother, I know that our love was never described in any book. It is like a heaven that one often lives through as a hell, yet as a sky, gives us a context, provides a sense to all those simple, small things that life is made of, a personal and unique story that every human being deserves as such.

October 14th, 2000

It is not true that I am over you: while cleaning my drawer I came upon the newspaper announcement of your death, and your photo hit my emotional center. Time doesn't heal by changing the past, time lays new pieces, atoms, grains ... whatever time is made of, and covers like dust the old painful days. But when, the dust is brushed away for any reason, the wound is still there: time never dies or passes for good... We who are consuming and creating time should beware of that.

October 15th, 2000

Mother, I am leaving tomorrow and going to Italy. You had your stroke October 21st, 1999. At noon, my father and the housekeeper entered your room, because you didn't come out and give the orders to the household. They were lost, without your command and without the legitimacy to take power in the house. They found you in a terrible condition: you were choking in your own vomit, your eyes were rolled back, your small body

convulsing, wet and dirty in your own body wastes, but you were struggling still...My father phoned me dramatically, I said, call the ambulance, and refused to understand his urgent message. He had done it so many times before, he was always threatening me with your death or his. And throughout years, these threats made me hard and ready for your deaths. I remembered you the night before, I had visited you: we spoke of Katia Riciarelli, the old opera singer from La Scala I was going to hear. I said, sorry that you cannot come, but you said, never mind, I am happy you are going, I will sit here and watch an Italian movie instead. Anyway, I do not feel very well, I feel very dizzy, I nearly didn't make it to the door when you rang the bell...This was our adieu...now a year later you are the same mother as in that farewell, it is I who have changed, who have had to deal with the dust of time; I was a little girl then and now, a year later, I am grown up. My body simply transformed, as my daughter's has, in this same year.

October 16th, 2000

Very soon I will not be writing of you: just thinking of you in a circle of the same comforting details, images. At this point I am wearing your clothes with as light odor of your non-existent body to them. I am actually consuming what is left of you and taking it all over; things and deeds, debts and gains, but it must be so, it must be done. We must go on, not backwards. Things will not be the same, we cannot stop them from changing. You didn't like that, things changing and being set free, but now I am doing it, by letting all the fixed things of your life breathe and change: me included. You were the master of art and beauty, but you kept things frozen and dead: me included.

October 19th, 2000 Torino

You came to visit me after my lecture: I was dressed in your elegant Italian clothes because I was in Italy, at the age you were in Italy. I was disguised as you and you came once again, as in Corfu this summer, disguised as a bat. You entered my hotel room and congratulated me on my good looks and success, but I was terrified by your looks, your death, and afraid you would be angry because I was using your clothes and pretending to be you. So I shut you out of my life, I hid in the cupboard among your clothes and after a

few minutes of blindly hitting the walls and screeching painfully, you found the window and rushed out. Sorry, but with you around one can never tell what may happen.

October 22, 2000

Today is the anniversary of when you got sick, one month before you died: the countdown has started. But today is also the date when the Polish Cardinal became the Pope. You were my pope, coincidences never cease to speak to us through coded language. Even wrong emotions are always true.

October 23, 2000

In your coat, in Budapest, on the bank of the Danube, on a cold sunny day, I am crying. Today is the date of my legal Matrimony: the day I got married to a man, to an outsider, and became part of the outside world. Inevitably my Matrimony reminds me how lonely I am and how alone without you to whom I was married first.

October 26th, 2000

My father has fallen and is hurt, but I feel nothing, not even a sense of guilt or duty to take care of him. He has women to take care of him instead of you, but I should feel something, or do something. I realized that since you died I am waiting for him to die too...

Ours was a place of fear: you fearing for my life I fearing for yours, ever since I was born ever since you survived me being born upside down. It was a difficult delivery for both of us and you never forgot that, making me remember it too.

When I think of you I imagine a deep black hole and you floating in that space with me holding on to your tender hand in fear to losing you. It is all in my head now, you, our black hole, our free and yet miserable world.

October 28, 2000

Bit by bit I am losing you, vividly I perceive you in semi-trances between sleep and waking, my insights on you fade when I open my eyes. Your friends, who used to think politically as you did, are giving up when confronted with the new reality and me. I am taking over control of my life and my state, as is everybody around me. Maybe you thought you had to rule until the very end because you were truly afraid that we cannot manage alone. Mothers do underestimate out of love, mothers offend out of love, mothers are not reliable people where judgement of the ones they love is concerned.

I have to cook, I have to clean, I have to take care of everybody and everything... Without you, a black hole is vacuuming my energy. You used to say, all that work all day every day and nothing really is ever left over. Of course, it is life that we are taking care of, it becomes visible only when it stops. Visible are only the lacks, the blanks, the holes of life. It is some kind of magic or magic tricks, what mothers do. As long as it lasts, the magic, your magic Mother, your love and working and taking care of life instead of me. The longer the better.

The magic of your love and working and taking care of life lasted only as long as you did, all that remains is a trick.

October 30, 2000

My dreams are becoming light and confused, as when I was a little girl. You are in them as a sunny figure though your life was a little sad life after all, even though you were a small dictator pretending to be a Goddess...

October 31, 2000

Sadness is overcoming me slowly, but it is not a depression. I feel good. I am drifting into the last days of remembering you, I am on the threshold of a new life: with low energy and big demands. I am unable to waste time as I did when I had a mother around with a broom in her hands to sweep away my rubbish. I am reading a book on how daughters make poems of their dead mothers out of big sentiments and feelings. In my book I am dissecting you, burning you, ruining you...I do not even envy those other mothers and daughters, I treat them like candy, unhealthy but very inspiring literature...I didn't even try to write such a book, immediately I did the opposite. I persecuted even the memory of you... A cruel animal I am...

I am menstruating heavily. When my daughter was born, and she had a small menstruation. I screamed, but you said, don't worry, that is your blood, she is not yet free of your blood. I am menstruating your life, Mother, your blood, it is ridiculous that you do not have a body anymore but have to use mine...

I am letting myself out in blood and vulgar language, I am not that type of a writer and we had not that type of mother/daughter relationship, we never mentioned words like menstruation, pregnancy, abortion. Of course we lived these things but in silence and conspiracy from language...Now I am loosening my tight upbringing and also my straight mind. These last days I will concentrate on obscenity, on words other women nowadays make literature of while we made a heavy shelter for our femaleness. Sex and body was never our issue, on the contrary it was our enemy and still is; if it wasn't for sex and body you would have still been here.

Seeing you in a ripe apple in the market, the pattern of clouds in the sky, my everyday cooking, grateful and ungrateful, a banal and holy job for those who transform their love in food.

Yesterday the woman who takes care of my father protected me from him, even though she is my age, she is paid by him, she is closer to him in thinking than I am. She behaved as my mother, and she used your words. I loved her as I would have loved you.

In all these months, I think I have examined all your drawers and cupboards. I found only two secrets among your things, your papers, jewels, shoes.... You had so many things...but only two simple secrets. An envelope with your doctor's pay hidden in a napkin, and a bottle of whiskey. Money for a cast out relative? Your repudiated brother, the drunkard? Your sick sister in law? Maybe some friend?

Whiskey, in our household, was associated with corruption. You must have been hiding it for the past 20 or more years, as you hid your communist friends in your attic during the war, risking lives of the whole household.

Two secrets, but like secrets of a small girl: no secret phone numbers, photos, bank accounts, children, lovers, killers, flats...My story of you is that you had no story, all your stories were your make believe. You didn't want us to see that you were just an innocent little girl who was exactly as she seemed to be; loving opera, Italian fashion, good beer and easy laughter...

October 31, 2000

Here is urgent situation at home, the press is here because it just discovered a secret police document to which we are all in , my family, me, my home, connected to my husband who was the last witness of a journalist shot journalist in Belgrade, in April 99. My husband was followed. He is the only eyewitness as well as the one who can guarantee the authenticity of the document, thus the order of murder by the secret police of Milosevic (my husband the editor in chief of the main opposition weekly). The chief of the police refuses to resign: if he doesn't do it today, the new government will resign. I am shivering. Just a few days ago I met the widow of the journalist in Turin. She is a historian, and she was holding hands with him and was hit on the back of her head when he was shot in front of their home. I am not afraid for our lives, I wasn't even in the middle of the bombings when the journalist was assassinated. My instinct to stay alive is worn out...I must be more of an idiot than I thought I was. My husband kept warning me, but having no high opinion either of my doings or of the

criminal deeds of the police, I could never put the picture together. You see, it seems, that my father's so-called friend was involved in all this. He is, among other things, the father of a woman who left the country because of his career and who has had a very hard life because of his job...I never knew what his job really was until now. He is not exactly James Bond, but not far from that image: good-looking, from a rich family, well -educated, very eloquent, tender and caring, he was like a second father to me and obviously my assassin, too. I guess our lives here are more those of actors than of writers: other people should write about us instead of us, since we miss the obvious. I feel so confused and flat that I can hardly think: I do not even want to write about this, anyway it is my husband's story, I am an essential element, the idiot who didn't choose her parents, much less her parents' friends...I want to talk to my father and see how much he was threatened, how much did he have to keep to himself. I guess my mother knew everything and that is why she was so anxious the last days of her life. She was rambling, half-conscious, I remember her saying to me, be careful, do not go to Germany, they are following you, they are watching you...The poor thing couldn't control her flow of secrets and I was never very attentive to her stories. I always thought them paranoid and old fashioned as all communist stories were. Unfortunately, the world we lived in until a few days ago was their script, and we just the scapegoats...or idiots. My husband is writing his story, it is his story and he always had a feeling, if not knowledge, of what was really going on...Me? I was the vessel of death to him The deadline for the chief of the secret police to resign is tonight, if he doesn't maybe we should move, our address is in the papers, our names...even my daughter's. And we all have different names and surnames, thanks to my feminist attitude, so we sound more like a Bader Meinhof terrorist group than a true family.

November 1, 2000

Your death month, the countdown, the farewell, the annual mourning, the trip over the ocean, the day of the Dead, and yesterday Halloween...what else? Today I called the tailor about altering your fur coat to make it. He asked me, how do you want it, modern? I said, I

do not know. He asked, do you want it bigger, I said, I do not know. What is bigger, what is modern, just words to point out the difference between your time and space and mine. Measurable in figures. Well, my lady, he said, you come over with that coat and we will decide what you want. I would give the government to that tailor, after he said that.

Nov.2, 2000

The anniversary of Pasolini's murder, 25 years ago, the day of the Catholic dead saints...

I was sitting alone in the dark living room of my friend Laura Betti, Pasolini's friend when the phone rang and the police told me about his cruel murder. I was supposed to break the news to her. I did and she wanted to kill the messenger. She spared my life but wanted to kill herself immediately after. Her best friend and a poet was massacred out of hate and spite against homosexuals, politically incorrect.

Sitting in the dark, without electricity, completely alone, waiting for my daughter to come home safely.

Nobody dared break the news to Pasolini's mother.

Nov 3, 2000

Last night I had a terrifying dream: I dreamt that my husband left me with you. You were old but alive. You tricked me, left me behind with some cold English family in a garden, who didn't want me either to go to a jazz concert. I followed you, I wanted an explanation, but in family matters explanations are usually superfluous and you, Mother, never did explain anything either to me or to yourself.

I realized, with sincerity, that all my adult life I have been waiting for you to die, in order to be free. We are as cruel as the mythology describes us.

Nov.4, 2000

Today is the day Serbian people visit their dead at the cemetery. You would be the only one I would visit if I had time. But I don't, I have to cook, to drive my daughter to school, and you would approve of my priorities. I will visit you some other time. Only people who do not visit their dead in their minds have to do it on foot.

Nov.5th, 2000

I am imitating my father, two monkeys, two clones, as I said...I wonder would you be happy or not seeing us like this. Now he replaced you with three women, and I am doing just the same, replacing you and replacing everybody and everything, making a self-centered system in which other people and objects are satellites. I feel self-sufficient and very efficient. Not really well, not in the least happy, but there is no room on this Matrimonial planet for happiness. But maybe that is exactly what you did, make room...

Nov.7, 2000

The power of illusion was your enormous strength, such strength in such a small woman. You see, I miss talking to you , not of politics, I miss talking to you as a friend...But did we ever do that, do mothers and daughters ever do that? I know that there were some situations when you talked to me as if I wasn't your daughter and then you were so smart, so cool, so beautiful: a world would spring from your tone, your movements, your steps.... You knew how to make love a decent affair.

Nov 8th, 2000

Mother, I want to stop writing this, I want to write for other people, not for us two. I do not want to wait for your death anniversary, I am panicking, I do not know what to do on these solemn occasions except make them work as they should, as someone else said they should, not by my rules.

Mother, set me free for a while, I will come back to do justice for mothers and daughters and the dead. The change is on the way and I cannot fight it anymore, I have to accept it.

Nov,9th, 2000

The beautiful crippled prostitute, Mica, who spends all her days sitting at my doorstep drinking beer, suddenly reminded me of you, and as I tried to wave it away, the arguments, the image became clear. Her hand is deformed, yours was too, her parents crippled her as a child to be a convincing beggar, rheumatism and work crippled yours...You both hold your hand in the same way, hiding it and showing it at the same time. You are both fat, around the stomach, but you carry your weight as a crown, with elegance and style. You are both small and rather rough, but kind. You are both obscene, but honest and decent in so many other ways in which people are usually corrupted. And you have that daring stare of love and respect for me that could turn at any moment into anger and aggression. Mother, I always thought Mica was my alter ego, actually you, as Mica's alter ego, are my alter ego.

Many dangers have been looming around our love...When I was born you were screaming in fear and pain and the nurses took me away from you quickly. When they brought you your baby, you looked at her and said, this is not my baby. They told you, well Madame, you certainly are not going to tell US that. And they checked the bracelet with the baby's name. But you refused to take the baby, to nurse her, and when you were alone you tore off the diapers and there it was, the proof, the baby was a boy...

When the nurses came back you were screaming again, give me back my baby, what have you done to my baby, and panic was spreading through the ward...everybody was looking for your baby. And they found me, calmly nursing on a gypsy's bosom. My false mother

handed me to you without emotions or tragic, took her baby , her seventh and went on nursing her with a smile.

You were sure I was your baby, but I am not sure anymore, I wonder, is my gypsy neighbor your daughter after all, and I a clone.

Among many desperate feelings that I survived with pills, beers, nightmares, the incredible feeling of rejoicing over death appeared. My father has it as an old fighter. He faced death when very young, he learned how to rejoice in danger and survival. My simple, strong-headed, and tender relatives from a poor and cruel region where people were treated as slaves, as scum, as women by various occupiers and where women would often dress as men in order to be treated better, know how to rejoice in death. I rejoiced in your death this afternoon, after a sleepless night fearing the death of my father. And I rejoiced at the thought of his death too, leaving me alive, alone in the world, as a miracle of life, in a trance...I feel close to that branch of my family that you banned from our home, from my culture and thoughts ...you were right as long as everything worked, but when misery struck me, and I became helpless, I had to find my way back to my primitive roots. I do not want to go back to my life of ten years before, before the wars, pain and cruelty, it was a soft miserable life in which I was depressed and low...All the bad that has happened to me has made me better.

Nov. 11, 2000

For 18 years a friend of mine has been taking care of her depressed mother: a beautiful big woman who was never there when she was a baby and whom she loves desperately.

I tried to imagine taking care of you in that way: instead I took care of my daughter, we both did. I was lucky to be a mother not only a daughter.

Nov.12, 2000

The transition has to end the day you died a year ago: I cannot manage these modern tyrants I guess because I do not even want to, when I see how demanding they are without cause. I get angry and waste my energy on anger. Your times were heroic, and you were this small fireball who played her historical role without complaint. I will never stop admiring you for that, or missing you.

When you began get very ill, a few years ago, you retired into yourself, your room, your basic needs abandoning your true emotional needs: asking only to be clean. (You were obsessed with cleanliness all your life, as a doctor and as a lady Macbeth. Always wearing gloves, tracking the invisible life of germs and fighting them ruthlessly.) You were not used to asking, just to giving . And not only that, you knew as a realistic politician of life, as a woman, that even if you asked, you wouldn't be granted any of the love and care you gave. Instead you would have been refused, insulted and frustrated: so you just retired in silence. You knew that old women were not only useless but excess weight. You didn't want to ruin the balance of your family that you had actually made. You didn't even ask me to help you, as a woman and as a daughter, hoping that I would be spared your fate. But, my dear, here I am now, with the same hopes for my daughter. And I think that with her we may not fail: she is of a better material, selfish and strong. You were strong, I was selfish but neither of us was both.

Sick, in your dark room, refusing food or guests, for years you sat pretending it wasn't so...You were waiting for your death, and I let you ...I do not feel guilty, just sad over my destiny to watch and be watched...and over the destiny of all young women who are going through the same pattern. They behave as rivals but they are in the same boat and they know it, no matter how they choose to behave. They are in a no-win situation where having bad choices is better than no choice.

Nov 14th, 2000

Some years ago when I lived abroad as a grown up and independent person and you were already back home in Serbia, stepping out of active everyday life ...I didn't yet understand your script, my family script. I didn't know the emotional blackmailing I had undergone, I just ran away from home thinking everybody does it...I only knew by then that you and father would try to ruin my emotional affairs with men or women by making them yours too...cutting out the best parts and using them to suit your needs. I felt controlled and watched and I left you. But after a few years of an extremely successful and independent life far away from you, I had a terrible breakdown. I remember that too well, it was a horrible fall into a void of identity, love, understanding, support. I was going crazy so I decided to go to the very end. I left my life and everything that was in it, from people to goods. I came back to my family nest, my home country I never knew but feared, ready to succumb to whatever would happen to me there. It was a journey to my heart of darkness, and it was a veiled attempt at suicide. Twenty years ago, and here I am, still alive, you gone, father going, me the big winner, tired, with white hair, with nerves and mind shattered and yet so sane and wise. Yes, my dear, I won my identity and life back: now I see what a big illusion this dream of yours was and what an actress you were to serve it to me so sweetly, and how much I loved you Mother, enough to give my life to my Motherland.

Nov 16th, 2000

Beginning to leave my daily remarks: yesterday I did have an insight, but it was over quickly as a lightning. I have interiorized you, to tell the truth. A year after you are gone, the strongest feeling about your death is that it cannot be true.

I am reading a book, the one I told you about where a daughter is loving and idealizing her wonderful poet mother: well, coming to the facts, you were a far better mother than this poet mother, not that famous or crazy, but personally I do not feel like talking in fables

about our relationship. I have tears in my eyes as I read this wonderful book. Our book is finishing too, in a matter of days as I promised, the lovely pages have dried, my tears mostly, too. We are bidding a solemn, soldier Balkan farewell to each other: no poets, no poetry. We both have hidden our poetic views from the world, even from each other...so why should our book have them.

You see the point, the last words in this lovely book, as well as in ours, are that, as I said: we do not want to let go of each other, but we have to. The living must live, the dead must disappear, but they never do, just as the living never really live as they used to without the dead. You hold and drag me nearly every night: last night I dreamt of a pedestrian zone that once had a tramline. I must have been two, you were holding my hand and we were waiting for the tram. Then all of a sudden, it wasn't you but my aunt, your sister, the first beloved one that left us, and then it wasn't me but my lovely cousin...the only stasis scene was the road with the trams... we were swirling exactly as in this American book, people and times, and injustices and blood and snow, and all upside down. I saw that there is no substitute for pain, we must go on. Well, when I woke up I had one question: where there ever really trams in that street?

Nov.17th, 2000

Images flying everywhere, my Mother was here, there, nowhere...

Nov, 18th, 2000

We are approaching your death anniversary practically and it feels good. We plan the food at your grave, the rakija, the food at home, as if you were there. I have given my blessing: the operation has succeeded. Nothing has changed at your home, in your bed, armchair...we are all hanging on as if you were there, what a legacy, what a Matrimony. I was suspicious with everybody and every move. This diary is witnessing it step by step, my doubts and rage. The monument of your life that is called Matrimony is definitely

preserved as a universal value: the food we will eat, the words we will speak, the manners and opinions we will exhibit...I only wonder shall we keep your chair empty or would that be too spooky...My photo is hanging from the wall, next to yours, I sit in your green armchair, the throne. I am sure that I have finished my duty with Matrimony, men and mothers and daughters.

My dear mother, Nov 19th, 2000

In this countdown only a fly is keeping me company: in this late, insane spring we are having here in Belgrade, because of your death and the bombs, I guess, flies are back to life earlier than they should, flowers blooming, women getting pregnant, old people dying. As if it were April, the cruelest month... And this fly is as lonely and as lost as I am. She is following me from room to room and I am letting her do it, as if she were my puppy: I had the same game with a cat , and now a fly...I imagine you as this fly, it must be at least part of your energy: unusual, unnatural times...

Nov 20, 2000

Last night I came home late. My father had left me a message on the answering machine, saying that he didn't feel well and that he would go to the hospital and maybe stay there... I was in the kitchen and suddenly a pink light entered the darkness and the usual kitchen light was turned into a lightning which lasted for a few minutes. I visualized the morning when I heard you had died, just few seconds after it happened: I was standing in the same place, and it was a morning full of light, as the one when you drank your last coffee looking out of the window of your bedroom. You, Mother, entered the kitchen last night at 1.30 a.m. and I was completely overtaken by a warmth, tenderness and sense of life and death...Everything seemed to fit the composition of a painting ...I kissed the colorful air and went to bed, saying to myself, Father may not die tonight after all. That is just how we do it, we as a family falling apart, and yet composing and recomposing ourselves into

eternity; I will let them come in and go out and I will hug my daughter , their granddaughter, not letting her too close to them. We are just a very decent family when it comes to the culture of death, we have cultivated death ever since we became a family... I remember seeing my newborn for the first time, her monkey face and the first thought that crossed my mind was: now I gave life to this monkey face and she will bury me some day...It was a happy thought. I was just talking to a stranger, to a baby whom I would get to know while she grows big and I grow small.

Nov21,2000

I took your dress and your fur coat and I brought them here to my flat. Today I am preparing dinner for a Saint, in your dress. The night before you died, the last night you slept and I wasn't there to hold your hand, I sat with people celebrating that same family Saint. Nobody saw my pain building up. The unnatural thing about a mother dying is that a mother is the most natural phenomenon for everybody in the world, and when she dies, the whole nature dies with it, along with the truth, happiness, joy, justice. All our constructed relationships fall apart in one second and mothers become just strangers who bear other strangers, nature a relative cosmic state of affairs... and man/woman a sample of life on one planet, and so on...That is why I didn't spend the last night with you, because my whole life I have feared that you would die but I never really managed to believe that it was possible.

Nov 22, 2000

Beautiful day, every day in insanely beautiful, warm until early afternoon, and then all of a sudden turning dark, cold... The same happened the year my daughter was born, I noticed the change of life then, of death now. Nature reacts to the transformation of energy...

This beautiful day at your grave: eating and drinking, like barbarians...My father kneeling and kissing your photo, saying, My dear Vera, here I come, like Cleopatra offering her hand to the snake, with the words: Anthony, here I come...All the graves around you are full by now...and I am completely empty.

A physical last detail: my whole body, since last night, bit by bit became paralyzed in pain: by the time the barbarian ritual in front of your grave was over- my mother in a vase with her picture on the marble stone – my body couldn't make a single move.

In your dress, the color of your beautiful deep sea eyes...a strange dress, in your raincoat, the color of your late autumn smelling hair...

In your living room, at your table, but not sitting in your armchair or using your plate... somebody else did it, with love, but I hated her ... the same intolerance I had a year and a half ago, during your anniversary dinner... Bombs were falling around us, next to your table, and you pretended it was all right, your politics, both private and public, of ignoring the facts and reinventing the truth. I hated you for that and I showed it openly... Now I hated these realists like me, who won privately and publicly, and I showed it openly. I miss you mother, even though I have your clothes, your movements, I will never be you as you were me.

THE END