

WRITERS MOSAIC

Snežana Ćurčić In Conversation with Goran Gocić

at the Tirana Film Festival

Snežana Ćurčić (SC): The opening and closing of the festival, it was an Italian film, *Parthenope*, by Paolo Sorrentino. The story is about a young woman, Parthenope. Everything takes place in Naples, which is Sorrentino's native town. And we follow Parthenope from her birth in 1950 through her teenage long summers and years as a young adult pretty aimlessly. What really struck me, this film was so heavily advertised, so I went there very enthusiastically, and the film was just this dream-like meditation on beauty, on love, on freedom, on that you name it, but then, my God, I was bored to tears. It was peppered with lots of fake philosophical ruminations. I don't know about other people, but I was completely lost about this main character. It was just dragged on. All I want to tell you, you haven't really missed a lot [laughs].

Goran Gocić (GG): [Laughs] It happens with good directors. Paolo Sorrentino is a good director. His previous movie was *Hand of God*, was excellent stuff. He's a really good filmmaker, and the expectations are pushed up, so it's one of those situations when you have a series of good movies, and then eventually, I mean, you have to fail. If you take risks, then you fail. And I think he's probably this type of director who takes a lot of risks. And I admire that too.

SC: Before I tell you about the other movie which just blew me away, was there any movie that really took you by surprise?

GG: Yes, there was one movie which really kind of caught me off guard, and it's called *Amor*. It's my personal favourite. It's probably the best film I saw at this festival. It's made by Virginia Eleuteri Serpieri. She's the daughter of very famous Italian artist. He created a comic book heroine called *Druuna*. It's a big hit all over Europe and the world. So I was really curious how it's going to come about in this movie. And it turns out, it's very personal story. It's about her mother. Her mother apparently committed suicide. She was a beauty and obviously prone to depression, and she decided one point to end her life when Virginia was still very young. And this film is kind of reconstruction of her life story. It's very imaginative film in a way all what one film should have. And I think this *Amor* managed to do the perfect balance. So you have family photo album and postcards and city of Rome through history and underwater world and long car drives and long portraits of beautiful actress. So I counted like seven, eight levels of this film. In the beginning, you don't know what's going on; you just jump from one to another, but as the film progresses, they finally come together, and you realise it's all parts of this story of the mother. So I thought it's very accomplished, it's very imaginative, and it's very good movie.

SC: There is a movie that I was dying to tell you about, *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World*, by Romanian director, Radu Jude. I had a blast. For me, it's so rare to see a new movie that speaks in a way like this movie. It really touched me, deeply, deeply touched me. It's very complex. It's very eclectic and has got

many different layers. The title itself, there is the whole story about the title, which is by this Polish-Jewish poet, Stanisław Jerzy Lec, actually the aphorism, 'Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World.' The poet, who survived a Nazi labour camp by escaping dressed in German uniform, also alludes to the creeping apocalypse of our everyday life today. It was probably one of the best movies I've seen in a long, long time. It's three hours long, and I could have stayed that longer. It just blew me away. It's the best thing in cinema I've seen in a long time. But I want to share something with you, Albanian film, *Kapedani*, the Albanian film that was shot 50 years ago.

GG: It was a classic of Albanian cinema. And even the film professionals don't know anything about Albanian cinema. It's like a black hole, in a way, of European cinema. It's a kind of movie that if you mentioned it in Albania, everybody would know about it. It's probably the movie that was seen and loved by our generation rather than youngsters today because it was made in '74. I thought it was great. It was a bit naive in a way. It was conscientiously naive. The world is seen through the eyes of protagonists, and protagonist is like old-fashioned guy. He was a chieftain in his village, in his prime, but during the reign of communism, the situation changes, and a lot of very important roles in society is given to very young girls. It was during the time when Albania was under strong influence of China. And it was the same thing; it was like all these communist activists became really important. So instead of him, there is this really young girl becomes chieftain instead of him. So she's making a lot of big decisions, and now he's trying to cope with it. And he's trying to cope with the new role of women in society, and he's like old-fashioned person. So that's basically

the plot of it. I thought it was a very funny movie. I thought it was really hilarious. At moments, I was laughing my head off.

SC: For me, it was great to be in the cinema at that moment because it was full, the house was full. There was this massive applause for an actor who was sitting two seats away to my left. He played in this movie. This actor is called Robert Ndrenika, and he's now in his 80s. And when I realised that actually there was this guy sitting near me, then I looked at his eyes, and then I realised, *this is when they say eyes really don't change*. There was a bit of a twinkle in his eyes. And also another little moment of realisation: when I looked at the screen, and then there was this guy sitting and watching himself, there was a 50 years in between the screen and him, then I realised, with the incredible sober moment and sad moment, the flickering nature of time and life. And above all, sitting in that audience, it was just being—sitting in the crowd who were delighted and applauding with joy to this film and to this actor. And it was great to be there to feel that.

GG: Many films, including several I saw in Tirana International Film Festival, were narrated from the first place in singular and dealing with the very private issues, you know, personal life and the death of the close persons and so on. Apart from the *Amor*, which I just talked about, it's *Eternal Father*; *Echo of You*; *Reading You*; *Getty Abortions*; *Ever Since, I Have Been Flying*.

SC: If I can jump in, the experimental film, *Elpis*, by Iranian-Irish filmmaker, Rouzbeh Rashidi, the first experiment film that I've ever seen, very, very personal.

GG: Right. So maybe there's definitely trend there. Maybe I would call this—it's not only in cinema, it's everywhere else, I think in art. Maybe we could call it a new subjectivity or something. At first, I was wondering maybe was it a preference of the programmer? Was it Agron is getting old and he's selecting [laughs] personal stories about death or something? [Laughs] But I don't think it's that. It's more like it's a trend. There are loads of movies like that made around the world.

SC: As a jury member, you picked up the one, my favourite anyway, the Brazilian one. What was the argument for having this movie as a winner?

GG: And *Balomania* won the prize. It's also narrated from the first person. This Danish woman travels to Brazil, and she finds there a secret subculture of making huge balloons. It's really difficult, like with other subcultures, to explain why people are doing it. Why would they dress like punks in London in the '70s? Or why would they make these balloons? It remains a secret. It's usually not very rich people. They're factory workers, and one has a small business and so on. So they invest their own money into creating these huge balloons, and they, at one point, they just send it off to the sky.

SC: And they spend years doing it.

GG: And they spend years preparing this event. And they finally let it go. That's it. And she enters this world with a lot of gusto, and she even becomes emotionally involved with one of the guys who makes balloons. This story, narrated with lots of passion, she transferred this passion of making balloons to the audience as well. It's

beautiful movie about human condition, how we trying to make our mark in the world in a way.

SC: And also, the balloons are not just ordinary balloons. These are the most amazing creations of—very funny ones, very colourful ones.

GG: Yeah, they're very colourful. And they, just to illustrate the scale, this balloon is like 40 metres in diameter. It's a huge thing flying over São Paulo. So everybody notices it. It's impossible to miss it.

SC: The takeaway of this festival for me is the joy of indulgence of watching movies uninterrupted for the whole week and a film or the festival as a way of escape from otherwise the mad world we are in somehow. And also, more importantly, sharing great conversations and even better food.

GG: For me, it's interesting that the decision to invite a Serb to a jury was a very eccentric idea. Albania and Bulgaria and Romania and Serbia are like the first neighbours, so the logic has it that the first neighbours should be collaborating on culture and should be close together, especially because the culture does not recognize the borders. So I realised that Albanian folklore is very close to the Montenegrin folklore and Montenegro is very close to Serbian folklore and Serbian is close to Bulgarian, and they overlap a lot. This logic of closeness, it's maybe idealistic one, but neighbours, usually, are fighting with each other also. So I guess, like the Irish, if you ask Irish about British, I mean, they would tell you probably a similar thing as Albanians would tell you about Serbs. It's obvious that the

communication is hindered. It should be stronger in an ideal world, but it's hindered. It's like we are living on different planets. We are taught to think about Albanians as our enemies. We have contested territories, we have touchy history, and so on, so on. Because all of that, my surprise how people were nice, how people were friendly towards us. It was even more surprising than if I went to some country far away. So you don't expect your first neighbours to be so friendly in a way. So that's my feeling. It's like I rediscovered some old cousins that we quarrelled over some trifle thing long time ago.

Snežana Ćurčić was in conversation with Goran Gocić

A recording of this interview can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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