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### Bosnian poetry

## Three Bosnian poems

Oct 25th 2010, 17:26 by T.J.

WRITING about contemporary poetry in Bosnia risks recalling the famous Monty Python catchphrase: "And now for something completely different." Damir Arsenijević, a lecturer at [Tuzla University](http://www.untz.ba/index_en.htm) ([http://www.untz.ba/index\\_en.htm](http://www.untz.ba/index_en.htm)), has just published (in English) *Forgotten Future: The Politics of Poetry in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. (<http://www.ceis-eu.org/publications/books/01.htm>) He traces the development of Bosnian poetry from the years of Yugoslav decline, through the Bosnian war, and since its end in 1995. His aim, he writes, is to redress the lack of work on Bosnian literary historiography since the late 1980s. Even for those passionately interested in the subject, this makes for pretty specialised reading.

The most infamous Bosnian poet was, of course, Radovan Karadžić, the Bosnian Serb leader now on trial for war crimes at the UN's Yugoslav war crimes tribunal in The Hague. Mr Arsenijević draws our attention to more worthwhile figures. Here are three poems he cites which I liked.

The first is by Asmir Kujović and was written during the war. In this context, "Chetniks" is a derogatory word for Serbs.

*That day, after many casualties,*

*we captured a position on Pissing Hill.*

*While we danced and played the accordion*

*while lamb was roasting and drink was flowing,*

*the Chetniks regained the position they had lost,*

*and continued the party. At our expense.*

This next comes from a longer poem by Marko Vešović, a Serb who stayed in Sarajevo during the siege. The poem captures something very Bosnian—or perhaps it's universal. The narrator is an officer who is describing a talk being given by the *hodža* (Muslim cleric) to his soldiers. ([Ćevapi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%86evap%C4%8Di%C4%87i)

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%86evap%C4%8Di%C4%87i>) are like hamburgers, but rolled into small sausage shapes.) The *hodža*, says the officer:

*explains to my soldiers how one should not be afraid of getting killed  
because enjoying yourself in this world is nothing*

*compared to enjoying yourself in the other where they are entitled to  
a hundred joys each bigger than the last*

*He depicts like a reliable eye-witness*

*gardens of paradise through which waters flow*

*that are a million times more emerald than the Una*

*He enumerates what is to be found there*

*grapes and figs and beautiful oranges*

*bananas and dates **Fuck the dates,***

***can you get ten ćevapi in half a pitta bread?** asks Crni.*

Finally the opening of a post-war poem from Adisa Bašić, which addresses the atmosphere of the years after the 1995 Dayton peace agreement:

*Aren't you just a victim*

*selling your own trauma?*

asked the Harvard blonde

with the brains worth half a million.

I couldn't find the words in English to say

*Do you have any idea how right you are?*

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