

Searching for Rade Tanasijević's *Quiet Places*

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Abstract

«Почроје» (Tanasijević 2009, 64), «They exist», thus begins the poem *Tiba mesta* (*Quiet Places*) from the poetry collection *Klimatske promene* (2009, *Climate Change*) by Rade Tanasijević's, later reprinted in his book *Salon odbijenih* (2014, *Salon des refusés*). This poem, however, would not be included in his books of new and selected poems *Nestajanje* (2013, *Dwindling*) and *Stvari oko mene ubrzano stare* (2020, *The Things around Me Are Rapidly Aging*) – at least not in the form it had in the earlier books. Instead, it would be condensed and transfigured into the title of one of the cycles of poems, which raises the question of whether the poet had lost faith in the existence of *quiet places* or whether he just wanted to expand and deepen this topic. Tanasijević often used the title of his poems for the title of the cycles of poems, which is especially noticeable in the selected and new poems (Tanasijević 2013; Tanasijević 2020). The poet, however, usually included the titular poem in the cycle itself – which (significantly) is not the case with the poem *Tiba mesta*. The basic premise of the following paper is that the poet's *quiet places*, the idealistic and somewhat utopian spaces, are scattered around Tanasijević's poetry and that they can be found, described and interpreted by close-reading all of his books of poems.

Keywords: Rade Tanasijević, Contemporary Serbian Poetry, Village, City, Utopia, Quiet Places

Abstract

«Esistono», inizia così la poesia *Luoghi silenziosi* dalla raccolta *Cambiamenti climatici* (2009) di Rade Tanasijević, poi ristampata nel volume *Salon des Refusés* (2014). Questo componimento, tuttavia, non sarà incluso nelle sue successive raccolte *Scomparsa* (2013) e *Le cose intorno a me stanno rapidamente invecchiando* (2020) – almeno non nella forma delle prime edizioni. Sarà condensato e trasfigurato, invece, nel titolo di uno dei successivi cicli di poesie: una circostanza che spinge a chiedersi se il poeta abbia perso fiducia nell'esistenza di luoghi silenziosi o se abbia voluto semplicemente ampliare e approfondire questo argomento. La premessa di base del seguente articolo è che i

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luoghi silenziosi del poeta, gli spazi idealistici e un po' utopici, permeano la poesia di Tanasijević e che possono essere trovati, descritti e interpretati leggendo attentamente tutti i suoi volumi di poesie.

Parole chiave: Rade Tanasijević, poesia serba contemporanea, villaggio, città, utopia, luoghi silenziosi



Introductory remarks

Before delving any deeper into the topic of this paper, a few remarks should be made on the term *utopia*, which will be used in the course of the text. However, these remarks are only to be understood as an attempt to explain in advance how I distinguish this term and its use from other, more or less similar terms and uses. Needless to say, I will only refer to the literary utopia/utopian literature – as far as other forms of utopia (utopian thoughts, ideologies, communities, religions, etc.) are concerned, I leave them out of consideration.

Defining utopia as an ambiguous, shady and vague term has become commonplace; although many attempts have been made in the past to delineate its meaning, no one can say with certainty what utopia is and what it is not. The reason for this lies in the fact that utopia (or the equally common word utopian) is mostly used in public discourse as a noun (or adjective) that simply refers to an “ideal”, “good” or “better” place. Judging by the use of the term and its rare definitions, the only widespread and well-known fact about utopia is that it was first used in 1516, in Thomas More’s eponymous book – all other details and nuances of meaning are up to the user to decide and decipher.

Some scholars have indeed noticed this problem and made some effort to offer a “usable” definition of the term utopia. For example, Darko Suvin in his famous essay *Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, a Proposal, and a Plea* from 1973 precisely identified one of the main features of utopia by stating that «[u]topia operates by example and demonstration, deictically» (2010, 18). Next, in *Utopia – The Problem of Definition*, Lyman Tower Sargent tried to extract some key elements that make a piece of literature utopian; among other factors, Tower Sargent underlined that «Utopia must contain a fairly detailed description of a social system that is *nonexistent* but *located in time and space*» (1975, 143, italics by U.R.). Differing slightly although essentially in agreement, Fátima Vieira in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* described the literary genre of utopia as one that is closely related to reality: «Utopists depart from the observation of the society they live in, note down the aspects that need to be changed and imagine a place where those problems have been solved» (2010, 8). Although Vieira’s definition, admittedly, corresponds more to the concept of eutopia (the positive utopia, Tower Sargent 1975, 138) than to the general, overarching term of utopia (which in a way encompasses all -topias),¹ it is nonetheless helpful in thinking about the constitutive elements of utopian literature and its relation to the real world.

¹ Vieira gives a brief, but also very instructive insight into the topic of the origin and history of the neologism, utopia: «Utopia [...] began its life as a lexical neologism, but over the centuries, after the process of deneologization, its meaning changed many times, and it has been adopted by authors and researchers from different fields of study, with divergent interests and conflicting aims. Its history can be seen as a collection of moments when a clear semantic renewal of the word occurred. The word utopia has itself often been used as the root for the formation of new words. These include words such as eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia, alotopia, euchronia, heterotopia, ecotopia and hyperutopia, which are, in fact, derivation neologisms. And with the creation of every new associated word the concept of utopia took on a more precise meaning» (2010, 3-5).

Hence, some of the key features of utopia can be derived from the above definitions. Three of these features are related to the physical qualities of utopia, namely its position in (1) space and (2) time and its (3) fictional character; the fourth is associated with its distinctive (4) relation with reality, which distinguishes it from other pieces of literature in that it «represents an ideal but nonexistent political and social way of life» (Abrams 1999, 327).

A few questions still remain unanswered: (how) can the concept of utopia be applied to the interpretation of poetry when utopia is traditionally recognised only as a distinct prose genre; if that is possible, what criteria make a poem or poetic opus utopian and can a precise boundary be drawn between utopian poetry and poetry with utopian elements; taking into account the indeterminacy of the concept, who can decide what is utopian and who can judge what is not?

Fortunately, a fair amount of literature has also been written on the subject of utopia in poetry and utopian poetry, which may be helpful in discussing some of the issues raised. Whether noting that utopian prose often incorporated poetry and that poetry itself generated legitimate utopian visions (Veselá 2016, 80-84) or considering the resemblance of distinct poetic structures to hypothetical social structures (Lawall 1976, 153), these and related texts and projects (e.g. Norman Finklestein's *The Utopian Moment in Contemporary American Poetry* and Jason Lagapa's *Negative Theology and Utopian Thought in Contemporary American Poetry*) paved the way for an analytical consideration of the utopian elements in lyrics. In order to avoid «rendering the concept meaningless», some of the authors considered «only poems with a considerably detailed vision» (Veselá 2016, 84), but I argue that such an approach discards more nuanced manifestations of the poetic utopias or utopian elements in poetry. In the following paper, however, I will endeavour to present one of such examples of poetics in which the utopian elements are dispersed and

implied throughout the opus rather than articulated or elaborated in detail in a single poem.

Although the question of defining utopia is far from exhausted on this occasion, consideration of the aspects of utopia and especially of the four characteristics as criteria for determining whether or not a work of art is utopian will hopefully suffice for the purpose of this paper.

Space coordinates of *quiet places*

As the biographical notes in all of Rade Tanasijević's books indicate, the poet was «born in 1962 in Draževac near Obrenovac» (Tanasijević 2013, 130), where he lives and works as a farmer to this day (Tanasijević 2000, 91). Draževac is a small village (approx. 1500 inhabitants) located in Belgrade's municipality of Obrenovac. This contextual information is very revealing when it comes to discussing the perimeters of Tanasijević's utopia. From it, one might think that Draževac is part of the Serbian capital and therefore an urban area; in fact, it is only administratively part of Belgrade and forms a contrast to the capital in almost every way: it is a small and rural settlement with a low population density and most of its residents are engaged in agriculture.

Although the image of Tanasijević's birthplace is immediately reflected in his poetry, its boundaries do not exactly correspond to those found in the official cadastre. The spatial dimensions of the poet's hometown are thus retrieved from various poems, from which it follows that Draževac is not outlined by the boundaries of the official state, but by the borderlines that the poet sets/finds. The differences in determining the borders of Draževac are notable in Tanasijević's poem *Častrno* – which, as the poet explains, is the old name for Draževac – where he states that «Више нико не зна где је» (Tanasijević 2000, 70).² That, however, does

² «No one knows where it is anymore».

not mean that the old borders of Draževac are forgotten/lost or that the village has disappeared; rather, it only reinforces the differences between the poet's and the official vision of the borders. It is clear that there is no real danger to the village itself – that is, to the poet's idea of it, as the village «Напоредо с веком траје» (Tanasijević 2000, 70).³

The persistence of the village is assured through a two-way mechanism that counts on its own ability to accumulate and preserve the original and traditional layers of culture on the one hand, and to serve as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the poet on the other. The fact that Tanasijević finds his inspiration in the folkloric-mythical layer of national culture and in the melodic dimensions of the Serbian language (Mikić 2020, 181) – that is, that his poetry arises from the unique perspective of the poet who finds himself on the borders of two worlds – brings his poetry closer to the poetics of other Serbian poets. Some of them were recognised and noted by Mikić,⁴ but the list of the poets and authors who constitute Tanasijević's poetic background is broader than has been recognised so far. Tin Ujević, Radomir Prodanović, Desimir Blagojević, Srboljub Mitić, Milan Dedinac, Rastko Petrović, Marko Ristić, Radovan Pavlovski, Raša Livada, Jovan Hristić, Borislav Radović, Ljubomir Simović, Živojin Pavlović, Vladislav Khodasevich, Ferdynand Antoni Ossendowski, Vladimír Holan, Dinos Christianopoulos, Wystan Hugh Auden, Wisława Szymborska, Emil Cioran, Bruno Schulz, Dylan Thomas: these are just some of the authors with whom Tanasijević's poetry communicates, showing that his poetry is by no means part of

³ «Lasts along with time».

⁴ Mikić named Desimir Blagojević as one of such poets from «a distinctive variant of interwar symbolism» (Mikić 2020, 181) whose example (especially in *Potpri*) Tanasijević overtly follows – moreover, Blagojević's name frequently appears in Tanasijević's poetic work (in epigraphs, footnotes, etc.), testifying to the fact that this line of tradition is indeed very important to Tanasijević.

Serbian *naïve* poetry,⁵ but rather part of modern, *educated* poetry, which is largely based on the intensive intertextual dialog with different authors of domestic, regional and world literature.

Thus, the discrepancy between the two visions of Draževac can be understood as the differences between the two strongly opposed concepts: the first, urban and official, which strives to redefine and reorder society and the land for better functionality and affordability and which can be understood as representative of modernity, and the second, rural and traditional, which nurtures its own heritage and myths and to which the poet himself belongs. But such a common bond is not simply hereditary or given by birthplace, for if that were so it would never be compromised; instead, it is also a meter of choice.

This is precisely what is depicted in Tanasijević's poem *Zima 1984* (*The Winter of 1984*), in which the lyrical subject (the 20-year-old boy) is trapped in the snow-covered village, half-destined to listen to the old men's stories and drink their *rakija* (Tanasijević 2020, 46), half-convinced that he is listening to the future self. Moreover, when reading the poems

⁵ The term *naïve* is used here not in the sense Friedrich Schiller used it in his famous paper *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*) from 1795, but to indicate the resemblance of a current of Yugoslavian (and Serbian) poetry popularised from the 1960s onwards and its topics and characteristics to naïve art in general. This poetry was collected and published in 1963 in the book *Orfej među šljivama – antologija savremenih srpskih pesnika sa sela* (*Orpheus Among Plums – An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poets From the Countryside*), in which such poets as Momčilo Tešić, Vukosava Andrić, Milena Jovović, Srboljub Mitić, Paun Petronijević, Dobrica Erić, etc. were featured. Another such publication – *Pastir traži dno neba: antologija poezije, slikarstva i vajarstva naivaca Srbije, Crne Gore i Republike Srpske* (*The Shepherd Seeks the Bottom of the Heavens: Anthology of Naïve Poetry, Painting and Sculpture of Serbia, Montenegro and Republic of Srpska*) from 2001, translated into English in 2004 – brought naïve art and poetry even closer together. As can be seen from one of Tanasijević's interviews, the poet is very aware of this tradition (he sometimes even quotes Srboljub Mitić), but claims that «his role models are elsewhere» (Ristanović 2019). It is nevertheless interesting that the editor of Tanasijević's first book of poems was none other than Dobrica Erić, one of the most prominent representatives of Serbian naïve poetry.

such as *Zima 1984*, *Kako izgleda svet* (*What Does the World Look Like*), *Prag* (*Doorstep*), etc., the reader can sense that the lyrical subject has made an agreement with himself, consciously choosing to stay in his village and spend his *century* there:⁶

Никад нећу напустити
своје село.

Овде имам све
што ми недостаје (Tanasijević 2013, 59).⁷

There are at least two distinguishable ways of separating Tanasijević's poetic, *quiet places* from the rest of the world.

The first of them, which is especially evident in the poet's first poetry collection *Potpor* (*Backflow*),⁸ depicts Draževac as a space surrounded by other towns and toponyms. As Radivoje Mikić rightly points out, the places and locations mentioned (Kolubara, Tamnava, Crljeni, Očaga, Obrenovac, Prekočage, Predor, Stublinska brana, Otoka, Umka, Peštan, Ivojevac, Staro draževačko groblje) stem from the poet's neighbourhood (Mikić 2020, 187) and mark what can be perceived as a well-known, familiar place for him. However, all the places mentioned not only signify the starting point for the poet's esoteric and mysterious meditations (as explained in Mikić's text *Mistika i svakodnevnica – Mystique and Everyday Life*), but they also mark what belongs to the poet's vision of Draževac and what does not.

For example, in the poem *Moj svet* (*My World*) the lyrical subject speaks about a drive through his hometown, celebrating what has survived

⁶ A few years ago, in an interview the poet revealed that he «chose the path of self-isolation» (Ristanović 2019).

⁷ «I will never leave / my village. // Here I have / everything I miss».

⁸ The poet himself explains this world at the outset of the book: «When one river at the mouth of another begins to flow upstream to its source due to the high water» (Tanasijević 2000, 6).

and what has not been disturbed or demolished by the inexorable forces of history and progress:

Преко хиљаду пута
пролазио сам овуда. погледом позлеђивао
ове куће, ове њиве, стуб термоелектране
у Црљенима, оне планине у измаглици.
Добро да је шта остало (Tanasijević 2020, 73).⁹

This is amplified in the poem *Male државе (Small Countries)*, where the need for the separated, personal world is expressed through the ironic-political allegory of small states:

Прелеп је живот
у малим државама
[...]
сударамо се
безглаво као
муве у тегли (Tanasijević 2020, 116).¹⁰

Perhaps the best example of what it means to be part of the rural environment and to live in a kind of utopian seclusion is found in the poem *Grad (City)*, in which the poet finds himself in the midst of urban space. Therein, the image of the city's balconies is compared with the image of the muzzles of English bulldogs. Immediately after this image, the lyrical subject notes that the growling fell silent and the city went to sleep (Tanasijević 2020, 151). However, the lyrical subject soon finds that the city never sleeps and that he only witnesses the change between day and night outside nature. In the new context, night does not mean rest

⁹ «Over a thousand times / I passed this way. my gaze wounded / these houses, these fields, the pillar of the thermal power station / in Crljeni, these mountains in the fog. / It is good that at least something was spared».

¹⁰ «Life is beautiful / in small countries / [...] / we collide / headless like / flies in a jar».

and sleep as it would mean in the rural areas, but indicates the new beginning:

Град почиње да пали
светлосну нерватуру.
Приближава се подземни хук (Тanasijeвић 2020, 151).¹¹

This vision of the ever-awake city is strongly contrasted with the subsequent vision of the village on three levels: first, instead of English bulldogs and their muzzles come the forest and the brotherhood with trees; second, the sound of the streaming sapwood of the hornbeam tree is used as a substitute for the bulldogs' growling; third, silence replaces the underground roar:

Зашто нисам остао у забрану
збратимљен са шумом?
Слушао бих струјање мезгре
под танком кором граба.
У сутон тамно жилиште
почињало би да шири прсте.
Тамо је све тихо и обично.
Иза поноћи отварају се
девичански извори. (Тanasijeвић 2020, 151).¹²

The juxtaposition of these two images – of the uncanny city, its muzzle-like balconies and underground roaring, and the mystical village, its peaceful silence and pristine springs – is here used as a metaphor of the alienation of people and as a critique of urbanisation and centralism. The city, depicted here as a hybrid, eternally alert, dog-like entity, has lost every

¹¹ «The city begins to turn on / the light venation. / The underground roar is approaching».

¹² «Why didn't I stay in the forest / in brotherhood with trees? / Listening to the sapwood / streaming under the thin bark of the hornbeam. / In the twilight dark root / would start spreading its fingers. / Everything there is quiet and ordinary. / After midnight / the virgin springs open».

connection with nature and, empty of all true values, serves only its own purposes. The reason why the lyrical subject nevertheless came to the city is revealed in the last stanza of the poem:

Дошао сам у град
да оштрим своја чула
као што мачка оштри своје нокте
о моје живо ткиво (Танасијевић 2020, 151).¹³

All of the poems mentioned (and many others not considered in this paper) testify that Tanasijević indeed «wanted to show to what extent the modern world is being emptied of values» (Микић 2020, 191) – that is, to oppose this outer world with his inner and personal space.

The second demarcation line outlines an even narrower space. It is found between the poet's house – his room, the land he cultivates and the few other familiar places – and the rest of the world. This can best be seen in the poem *Jabuka (Apple)*, in which the lyrical subject recapitulates the past year, the work done and, far from everything that could jeopardise his peace, enjoys winter in his *quiet place*:

Дошла је зима
требало је одавно изаћи
из снебивљивог тела
и кренути на север
тамо пронаћи оазу тоpline

поседујем описив мир собе
ствари углачане многим додирима
имам дрва за две зиме
имам несаницу за тисућу бдења

имао сам боговетно лето
виноград обасјан виноградском бресквом

¹³ «I came to the city / to sharpen my senses / like a cat sharpens its claws / on my living tissues».

у срцу неповредив храм
кроз нити јутаног цака
посматрао сам небо

сати ноћног орања су за мном
још једна година затворила се

моја соба је капсула у кошави

устајем и бацам
љуску од јабуке на пећ

ноћ може да почне¹⁴ (Tanasijević 2004, 9).

The same applies to the poem *Dobitak (Winnings)*, which depicts the view from his room:

Могло би се говорити да сам у добитку.
Кроз прозор гледам увек исти, никад исти
предео: две трећине неба, једна трећина
земље. Верујем да сам у добитку (Tanasijević 2020, 78).¹⁵

Last but not least, it should be noted that *quiet places* are not always peaceful – that is, that they come with some downsides. In the aforementioned poem *Jabuka*, for example, these are manifested through

¹⁴ «Winter has come / one should have come out a long time ago / from a shy body / and head north / there find an oasis of warmth // I own a descriptive calm of the room / things polished by many touches / I have enough firewood for two winters / I have insomnia for a thousand vigils // I had a godly summer / a vineyard lit by a vineyard peach / an inviolable temple in the heart / through the threads of a jute bag / I gazed at the sky // hours of night ploughing are behind me / another year has passed // my room is a capsule in the Košava wind // I get up and throw / apple peel on the stove // the night can begin.»

¹⁵ «It could be said that I am winning. / I look out the window at always the same, never the same / landscape: two-thirds of the sky, one-third / of the earth. I believe I am winning.»

the lyrical subject's insomnia («I have insomnia for a thousand vigils»). Or in the poem *Krevet (Bed)*, where these are signified by solitude:

Спавам у кревету од црвене врбе
много ме година окува
[...]
у веку који се гласи
касно је већ, време је већ
да се у овом кревету живот зачне
или угаси (Танасијевић 2004, 20).¹⁶

The permanence of *quiet places* is sometimes also seen as threatening, especially in the poem *Glad u očima (Hunger in the Eyes)*; in it, the lyrical subject is lured and sedated by the sight of the apple tree in front of his house. This tree apparently has some mystical powers, for it serves as a trigger and vehicle for the lyrical subject's meditations and dreams about the ideal world:

Ту иза спуштених очних капака
почиње раскошна покрајина.
Видим сунчане градове, видим улице –
засаде кућа. Крећем се
по тачно уписаним координатама успеха (Танасијевић 2020, 102).¹⁷

However, the idealistic vision is demystified when the lyrical subject becomes aware of the apple's luring mechanism:

Отворим ли очи
Видим – то што видим:
стару јабуку пред кућом.
Њен глас слушавам годинама.

¹⁶ «I sleep in a bed made of red willow / I have been surrounded by many rings / [...] / in the age that shouts / it is already late, it is already time / for life to be conceived / or end in this bed».

¹⁷ «There, behind the lowered eyelids / begins the lavish landscape. / I see sunny cities, I see streets – terraced houses. I move / according to the exactly determined coordinates of success».

Некад ме будно.
Сад ме у сан затвара (Танасијевић 2020, 102).¹⁸

Conclusively, if the first of these discerned spaces is demarcated from the official registers and from the rest of the world, the second is separated from the first by an invisible moat or an interstice, similar to the one found in the poem *Pčela* (*Honeybee*):

У соби између унутрашњег и спољашњег
прозора остала је мртва и сасушена пчела,
и њен зуј још чујан у глумом ваздуху (Танасијевић 2020, 77).¹⁹

To put it differently, the former space serves mostly as a buffer zone between the outside and inside world; the latter (safe space), however, is only accessible to the poet.

These ‘clear borders’, as expressed in Tanasijević’s poem *Granice* (*Borders*), are also necessary for the lyrical subject himself. That is why he says:

Да бих могао да живим
у одвојеним световима
потребне су ми јасне границе (Танасијевић 2020, 167).²⁰

The notion of clear borders (which, admittedly, are fading and disappearing in the poem) argues that the lyrical subject, disappointed with almost everything that can be found there, consciously decides to build his *quiet places* and retreat to them. Those are some of the reasons why these

¹⁸ «When I open my eyes / I see – what I see: / an old apple in front of the house. / I’ve been listening to its voice for many years. / It used to wake me up. / Now it rocks me to sleep».

¹⁹ «In the room between the inner and outer / window, a dead and dried honeybee remained, / and its buzzing – still echoing in the deaf air».

²⁰ «To be able to live / in separate worlds / I need clear borders».

safe spaces – or, in the poet’s words, these *quiet places* – and the characteristics of their spatial dimension can be seen as utopian.

Time character of *quiet places*

As for the temporal characteristics of Tanasijević’s *quiet places*, they are also manifested in his poetry in two main ways: either by warping, neglecting or reversing the dimension of time and its effects or by traveling through time.

The first way counts first and foremost on a unique temporal conception that differs from the generally accepted, linear perception of time. The exclusion of the lyrical subject from the process of ageing is one of the manifestations of such a conception, the significance of which can also be felt on the paratextual level – more precisely, Tanasijević’s last book is named *Stvari oko mene ubrzano stare* (*The Things around Me Are Rapidly Aging*) after one of the poems from the cycle *Tiba mesta*. In this poem, the lyrical subject notices the changes in the things that surround him: the roof tiles have turned green and the white fence has turned grey, the joinery is marked by weevils and the only mirror in the house now has age spots (Tanasijević 2020, 169). But when the lyrical subject expresses his concern about this, his mother comforts him:

“Не брини, сине!” каже ми мајка.
“Планину Маљен не видим више
са свог прозора. А знам да је тамо.
Отуд нам долазе млади дани” (Tanasijević 2020, 169).²¹

It is possible that this poem ironises the theme of time and ageing and, by reversing the roles in time, attempts to alleviate its symptoms and consequences for the lyrical subject – but that would only be one of the layers of meaning in the poem. On another, more vitalistic level, it can

²¹ «“Don’t you worry, son!” my mother tells me. / “I can no longer see Maljen mountain / from my window. But I know it is there. / From there our young days come”».

mean that *quiet places* themselves take on some of the burdens and consequences of the lyrical subject, protecting him in this way from the outside world.

An equally unusual relationship to time is found in Tanasijević's poem *Časovničar (The Watchmaker)*, in which the lyrical subject finds himself in a watchmaker's workshop, apparently repairing his broken watch. What initially looks like an ordinary visit to the shop quickly becomes anything but ordinary when the lyrical subject begins to meditate on the nature of time:

Понекад мислим да храним механичку
квочку која леже звоцаве секунде (Tanasijević 2020, 114).²²

It is evident from the following lines that the lyrical subject does not believe in a linear and chronological conception of time, as he reveals:

Никад нећемо успети да повежемо
узастопне делиће времена (Tanasijević 2020, 114).²³

His opinion and perception of time is once again confirmed in the poem's finale. After the watch has been fixed, the lyrical subject concludes:

Ето,
заменио сам зупчаник величине труна
у сложеном механизму бесмисла.
Сада ради тачно. То је то (Tanasijević 2020, 114).²⁴

The only real way of surpassing the limitations of time and its fragmentation is seen in writing. For Tanasijević, it is poetry and the very act of writing itself that can slow down and reverse change, that can stop time and perpetuate what can be understood as utopian:

²² «Sometimes I think I'm feeding a mechanical / hen that lays ranting seconds».

²³ «We will never be able to connect / consecutive shreds of time».

²⁴ «There, / I've replaced the whit-sized gear / in a complex mechanism of nonsense.
/ Now it works right. That's it».

Све записати запамтити
јер мења се из часа у час
мој свет твој свет нестају (Танасијевић 2020, 70).²⁵

The second temporal characteristic of Tanasijević's *quiet places* can be seen in the ability they offer the lyrical subject to travel through time. One of the examples for this can be found in his poem *Varka (Delusion)*, in which the lyrical subject explicitly states that he is traveling through time:

путујем кроз покретне
и непокретне празнике
кроз језик рода (Танасијевић 2020, 57).²⁶

The aforementioned journey *through the language*, as indicated with the example of Častrno (Draževac) at the outset of this paper, occurs mostly in Tanasijević's first book of poems. There, the poet experimented with the ancient layers of language, with toponyms, archaisms, neologism, etc., which Mikić described as «a kind of poetic-linguistic archaeology that implies a movement towards very old layers of culture» (Микић 2020, 181), but which most certainly depends on the lyrical subject's ability to cross different temporal barriers – the ability gained through *quiet places*.

Other form of time travel is made possible by the lyrical subject's strong relationship to tradition and his ancestors. Thus, in the poem *Praznik (Holiday)*, he states the following:

Постојим у безбожним
псовкама предака.
Били су то истински песници земље (Танасијевић 2020, 166).²⁷

²⁵ «To write everything down to remember / because it changes from hour to hour / my world your world disappear».

²⁶ «I travel through movable / and immovable holidays / through the language of my people».

²⁷ «I exist in ungodly / ancestral curses. / They were true poets of the soil».

The bond between the lyrical subject and his ancestors, and thus his ability to travel through time is embodied in these lines in several ways: first, by the fact that both the lyrical subject and his ancestors were farmers and thus poets; second, by the common language; third, by the celebration of the same holiday, which itself serves the threefold function of confirming the existence of the ancestors, of the lyrical subject and their deep connectedness that transcends time.

This same ability enables the lyrical subject in the poem *Slavija, Greennet* to move quickly from imagining the past in a café in Belgrade's famous square to a point in time in the past and to that very square before it was filled with cafés or other signs of modernity. The boundaries between the past and present are thus abolished, so that *the now* simultaneously signifies *the past* and vice versa. All of this is acknowledged by the lyrical subject at the end of the poem:

Хтео сам само да кажем како неке срећне сате
дугујемо чулним обманама и искривљеним
пројекцијама (Танасијевић 2014, 30).²⁸

And although he claims that this ability of his is a «sensory deception» or an effect of the slant «projection», he still thinks that this «strange habit» has provided him with a few happy moments in life. Thus, the lyrical theme confirms that this ability is one of the keys to entering an ideal, utopian world of *quiet places*.

Quiet places relation with reality

As seen from the previous two sub-chapters, Tanasijević's *quiet places*, even though they are completely fictive and can be excerpted only from various

²⁸ «I just wanted to say that some of the happy hours / we owe to sensory deceptions and slant / projections».

poems, are firmly situated in both space and time. This is also in line with Tower Sargent's definition of topos in utopia, which states that utopia «must be located spatially and temporally [and] even though nowhere, it must have some place», that is, «the voyage – whether through space or time – has been the device used for locating» utopias (1975, 138). This confirms every important physical quality (time, space, fictionality) of Tanasijević's utopian vision of *quiet places*. The only element of utopia not covered by the analysis so far is its relation with reality.

When it comes to this aspect of *quiet places* – that is, (in Abrams words) to the representation of *an ideal but non-existent political and social way of life* – Tanasijević's poetry provides 'fertile ground' for analysis. This aspect of utopia also manifests itself in at least two ways: through the poems directly inspired by the political and social occasions and through the poems that report on the poet's position in society. Both of these groups of poems incorporate more dystopian than eutopian nuances, but what is characteristic about them is that they all testify to the unique perspective of the lyrical subject who marks the changes in society and compares them with the past and/or with his visions of a better world.

The first group of poems alludes to real events in history and everyday life, such as war battles – *Bitka na Neretvi* (*Battle of Neretva*) –, public holidays – *Dan pobjede* (*Victory Day*) –, state elections – *Predizborna tišina* (*Pre-election Silence*) –, etc. These poems, however, never directly refer to or talk about the events, but only take them as background support to convey the criticism of society and official politics. The poem *Bitka na Neretvi*, for example, evokes the eponymous, famous movie by Veljko Bulajić from 1969 (allegedly the most expensive movie-project in Tito's Yugoslavia) and thus the Fourth Enemy Offensive – the glorious *Battle for the Wounded* thematised in the movie. But instead of celebrating the Yugoslav Partisans' *raw courage*, this poem actually conveys a message about accelerated privatization, the collapse of cinema and the conversion

of cultural and public space into private business and ownership.²⁹ Therefore, the scene from the movie that the lyrical subject – *sitting in the doorway of the warehouse building that was once a cinema* – evokes, in which the actor Fabijan Šovagović shouts «ПРЕКО ВОДЕ ДО СЛОБОДЕ»³⁰ (Tanasijević 2020, 144) just a moment before drowning, becomes even more tragic when one considers the freedom and dream for which the heroes ultimately fought.

The second group of poems, by contrast, depicts contemporary society and its structures in depth, but in a rather covert way and mostly through the perspective of the poet or his position within that society. The most interesting poem in this sense is the poem *Razgovor s majkom* (*A Conversation with Mother*), which, through the words of the lyrical subject's mother, paradoxically suggests that the poet is a bandit, but not because he holds a gun while staring at innocent passers-by, but because he writes poetry (Mikić 2020, 195):

“Лепим се послом бавиш, сине!”
каже ми мајка. “Писањем песама, разбојниче”! (Tanasijević 2009, 29).³¹

The fact that in society, but, more importantly, that in Tanasijević's immediate surroundings the poet is called a bandit, speaks clearly about what the lyrical subject of the poem *Sudnji dan* (*The Judgement Day*) will openly acknowledge: that poets are not respected (Tanasijević 2020, 60). The same motif, articulated somewhat differently, will appear in the poems

²⁹ In recent years this has been an intriguing topic not just for poets, but also for cineastes. Mila Turajlić's documentary called *Cinema Komunisto* (2010) deals with the creation and deterioration of the cinematic dream of Yugoslavia reflected through the process of privatisation of the Avala film studio. Interestingly enough, a great part of Turajlić's documentary is also dedicated to the movie *Bitka na Neretvi*.

³⁰ «ACROSS THE WATER INTO FREEDOM».

³¹ «“Nice job you've found to do, my son!” / my mother says. “Writing poetry, you bandit”!».

U zemaljskoj slavi i sjaju (In Earthly Glory and Splendour), Ružama se okeruži (Surround Yourself with Roses), Doktor Svetislav Nikolić (Doctor Svetislav Nikolić), etc.

Whether it is about concrete phenomena in society, as in the first case, or about abstract categories of society, its structures and the position of the individual (the poet) within these structures, Tanasijević's poetry is undoubtedly characterised by immediate references to reality. Moreover, one of the main characteristics is the poet's tendency to use his poetry to highlight certain problems in society and confront them – perhaps by persistently and perseveringly devoting himself to such a 'pointless' occupation as writing poetry. That is also the last and most important utopian peculiarity of Tanasijević's poetic, *quiet places*.

Conclusion

So far it has been shown that Tanasijević's poetry has all the elements that are constitutive for a literary utopia – it constructs fictive (*quiet*) places that are both situated in time and space and have a pronounced, critical relation with reality. In this conclusion, two more poems in which the lyrical subject speaks up about his position in society from the very centre of *quiet places* should be taken into consideration. The first of these, *Tri zvezdice (Three Stars)*, shows the stubbornness, pride and determination of the lyrical subject to stay in his hometown, even though he is considered notorious there:

Људи у овом селу
Лагано се окрећу против мене.
Не праштају ми више ни најмањи пропуст (Tanasijević 2014, 34).³²

³² «The people in this village / gently turn against me. / They no longer forgive me even the slightest mistake».

Interestingly, he pleads guilty and admits three faults: first, that he has taken poetry seriously and life jokingly; second, that he has hoped his work would be appreciated by someone; third, that he has spoken about things that also concerned his fellow citizens. This can also be understood as the poet's main 'curse', which is not absent even in close proximity to *quiet places*. But, as can be seen from the end of the poem, that does not mean that the lyrical subject will leave poetry. Moreover, it is precisely in his curse – that is, in the social condemnation and disapproval of his profession – that he finds the basic drive for his creativity. So he will say:

Признајем. Не постоје успешни песници.
[...]
Али не намеравам да ускоро одем.
А и куда бих?
Тамо где ме уважавају
Нема никога од вас
И смртно је досадно (Танасијевић 2014, 34).³³

The well-deserved gratitude for his work and hope that, although completely fictional, *quiet places* can from time to time be found in traces – especially there where envy is absent – shimmer through the poem *Počasti* (*The Honours*). Instead of laurels and literary prizes, the lyrical theme in this poem is only honoured by the attention of two young girls and an old woman who hint at what true utopia should look like. Therefore, rather than with any superficial or vacuous remark, I would like to conclude my exploration of Tanasijević's somewhat utopian, *quiet places* with the full translation of this poem.

Две девојчице које се смејуље.
ЈЕСТЕ. ТО ЈЕ ПЕСНИК. ПОЗНАЈЕМ

³³ «I admit. There are no successful poets. / [...] / But I have no plans to leave anytime soon. / And where would I go? / There, where I am respected / There are none of you / And it is boring to death».

ЊЕГОВ НАРАНЦАСТИ ТРАКТОР.
СМЕШАН ЈЕ. ЈЕСИ ЛИ СИГУРНА?

Једна старица болесна од реуме,
од преосталих година, од чекања
да се врате МОЈИ ИЗ НЕМАЧКЕ –
устаје са столице и љуби ми руку (Tanasijević 2014, 35).³⁴

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³⁴ «Two little girls laughing. / YES. THAT’S THE POET. I KNOW / HIS ORANGE TRACTOR. / HE’S FUNNY. ARE YOU SURE? // An old woman suffering from rheumatism, / from the remaining years, from waiting for / HER PEOPLE to return FROM GERMANY – / gets up from her chair and kisses my hand».

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