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Treatment¹ for the TV Series and Film
Rebecca West – Black Lamb and Gray Falcon

A Note on the Treatment

The idea that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Rebecca West's voluminous travel (and not just travel) book, could provide an exciting starting point for a TV series, dates back to 1988/9, when some fragments from this book, translated by my father, Nikola Koljević, were published in the *Književne novine* review. The Chief Director of Televizija Sarajevo, Slobodan Terzić, was interested in initiating this project as a coproduction between JRT and BBC. The negotiations did not go far, apart from a meeting I had with the editors at BBC in 1989, during the summer that I (then still a student of dramaturgy) spent in London working illegally as a cook in a restaurant. In these circumstances, which were soon about to change, in our country at least, a project of this scope could not be carried out.

In the middle of the nineties – when Rebecca West's book gained new, global, popularity – Terzić, now Head of Drama Programmes at Televizija Beograd, contacted me again, with a proposal to reinstate the co-production, but it nevertheless remained too ambitious for TV Beograd's logistic and other capacities.

This treatment was written in 2010, in English, when the third, and so far the most resolute, initiative to realize this film was put forward. The producer Gabriela Tana, who was, at the time, producing Ralph Finnes' film *Coriolanus* in Belgrade, became interested in the project through Terzić and Anđelka Vlasisavljević.

Gabriela Tana managed to obtain (for a limited period only) the rights for a screen adaptation of the book, and hired me to write a treatment for it. Her plan was to get either the BBC or Channel 4 interested in doing a mini series or a film... For now, that's the end of the story about this project. Maybe some day the story will continue.

In writing this treatment, I used, apart from the book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, the excellent biography of Rebecca West, written by Victoria Glendinning, as well as diverse sources on Stanislav Vinaver (her guide Constantine in the book) and the Yugoslav literary, social and political scene of the time.

Treatment

(Fragments)

¹ A piece of prose, typically written before the first draft of a screenplay.

“I had to come to Yugoslavia because I knew that the past has made the present, and I wanted to see how the process works.”

October of 1934. Rebecca West (42), a prominent writer and a sensitive woman, is waking up from anesthesia, after a difficult hysterectomy operation.

She is depressed, visited by her husband Henry (40), and by her former lover H.G. Wells (69), who is also the father of her son Anthony. Her son is not coming to visit her in the hospital, he is finding college related excuses; (they are on bad terms, he adores his father, which just adds to her emotional strain).

In a gloomy personal situation, Rebecca tries to find peace in listening to the concerts on the radio during her sleepless nights. Music is interrupted, and the first news from the outside world burst into Rebecca’s hospital room: Alexander, the King of Yugoslavia, is assassinated in Marseilles.

Rebecca is more than upset. The nurses can’t understand her reaction, but they consider it to be a psychological consequence of her operation. Yet Rebecca insists that the assassination is an omen, and that a new World War, the terminal one, will follow this assassination of a crowned Balkan head.

Recovered and discharged from the hospital, but still very anxious, Rebecca watches a cinema newsreel of the assassination of King Alexander, the first filmed assassination in history. And she is strongly affected by the images...

Rebecca decides to travel to this country, and to try to prove that she is right, so that she could warn the others about the growing danger of war. She believes that this journey to the source of the tragic and destructive energy that is spreading in the Balkans – in the ‘heart of darkness’ of Europe – can help her to understand her own fate, and the fate of the entire Europe.

(Because of Henry’s close family relations in Germany and business connections with Berlin, Rebecca and Henry are well aware of how dangerous Hitler’s Germany is and will be.)

She tries to convince her publishers and literary agent that this trip would be a research for a crucial book she could write, but everybody thinks she is crazy, that it would be a ‘creative and commercial suicide’ at the moment when public is expecting

a new novel, and when she has writing engagements with leading magazines. Everyone blames it to her 'ups and downs', and the long term psychological consequences of her operation.

Nevertheless, the British Council enables her to reach the only interested party in her Balkan adventure, the man from the British Foreign Office in charge of intelligence for the Balkan region. Rebecca should gather and provide information, mainly about the general attitude towards Germany and Britain and about the attitude of the high officials of the government. Even though she thinks she is 'an unlikely spy', she accepts this commitment.

Her doctor/analyst, who is also her friend, believes that (after a period of recovery) this journey can help her to overcome the side effects of the hormonal changes she is going through – mood changes, pessimism, the fear of the approaching death.

In the spring of 1937, Rebecca and her husband embark the train to Yugoslavia. After five years of marriage, their relationship is at the point of re-evaluation. (Henry is an unsuccessful banker, two years younger than Rebecca; a man in her shadow, an image of an 'educated English gentleman' that mostly Rebecca creates – but also a philander.)

They are sharing the train compartment with some German tourists, who are going to the Adriatic coast. The Germans are delighted with Henry's perfect German, (not knowing that he was interned in a war camp in Hamburg during the Great War). The behavior and the statements of the Germans reveal a growing danger and bring personal accounts of what is going on in Nazi Germany. Besides them, a tanned Slav young man is also in the compartment. As he goes to the restaurant, the Germans give Henry his seat, and refuse to let him back in, because he doesn't have a ticket for the 1st class. As the train enters Yugoslavia, and a Croat ticket collector comes in, and, as it turns out, the Germans also don't have the 1st class tickets. When the ticket collector asks them to pay the difference, they try to bribe him, and finally pay him only after they made him angry. Rebecca and Henry are appalled, experiencing a preview of the near future.

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At the station in Zagreb, Rebecca and Henry are met by Constantine (45), a curly and flamboyant Serbian poet of Jewish origin and the government official who will be their guide during the expedition through Yugoslavia.

...

The steamer stops at the harbor of Hvar, where they witness a most significant scene for Rebecca's emotional condition. Crowd on the quay form an alley to make place for four men carrying a stretcher with a sixteen year-old girl, exquisitely beautiful and very ill, who is being taken to a hospital in Dubrovnik, without her consent, because she lost her will to live. Her look is hostile, as they carry her, in silence.

The crowd divides again, and some other men hurry along, bearing a chair to which a very old woman is strapped. As bearers halt in maneuvering her on the gangway, she rises up in the chair with an angry sound. This strong image of the craving for living, as opposed to the desire for death and the auto-destructive force of the girl, provokes an intense reaction in Rebecca. She shivers in a panic attack, wanting to escape, to get off that ship... In a tormenting revelation she sees this as the main conflict of her own life, and in a disastrous way the main conflict of the world around her, which is closing up on her... As Henry tries to calm her, she faints...

...

They stop at Herceg Novi, at Monastery Savina, the first Orthodox monastery they see. There is nobody around, and the driver suggests they should pull one of the two bell ropes, to announce the arrival of guests. Rebecca reaches for the rope, and a terrible scream is heard, as an old monk rushes towards her and grabs her hand. Rebecca is frightened, the monk explains that she was about to pull the wrong bell, the passing-bell, the bell which announces somebody's death. He tells them that King Alexander came here just before he embarked for France, and pulled the very same passing-bell, instead of the guest-bell.

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As they continue their drive, they enter Bosnia and Herzegovina, the world of Orient.

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Finally they arrive in Sarajevo, all covered with mud from the car wheels. Rebecca is eager to see Constantine, but he is arriving in the evening.

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In the afternoon the belly dancer Astra comes to teach Rebecca. But the lesson in the *danse de ventre* is not a success. Rebecca picked up the moves, but can't produce the right effect. She is too slender: 'not enough flesh' Astra says. They talk, and Rebecca finds out that Astra is 'all decency and good sense'.

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Tomorrow morning Constantine takes them to the Town Hall. The clerk in the Town Hall shows them the reception room where Franz Ferdinand and Sophia came just before they were assassinated. Constantine tells them how he saw this reception as a boy, because his father was a clerk and brought him. Vividly he evokes it – Ferdinand was outraged because just a few minutes ago, on their way to the Town Hall, a bomb was thrown at him, in a first assassination attempt, and his aid-de-camp was wounded. He yelled at the Military Governor, and at the Mayor who was giving a welcoming speech. After the manuscript of his speech was brought to him, he started behaving "like a madman, because the manuscript was all spattered with the aide-de-camp's blood." All the people are feeling awkward and looking at him in silence; it is bizarre because they know that when he goes out, he will certainly be killed. If there was one attempt, others will surely follow.

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Rebecca steps out onto the balcony, where Ferdinand was standing and looking at the city just before his last ride. She tells Constantine: "I shall never be able to understand how it happened. Not because there are too few facts, but because there are too many. ..."

Constantine takes them to the spot where the assassination happened, and they see a black tablet with an inscription. Standing there, under the strong midday sun, Rebecca has a vision of the event...

They visit the graves of the three assassins. All of them were under age – too young to be hanged, so they were sent to jails, where they were killed before the end

of the war. Henry sees that Rebecca is deeply moved, that she is under the spell of Constantine's vivid and passionate description of the events.

...

Tomorrow Rebecca, Henry and Constantine take the train to Serbia, to Belgrade.

Rebecca and Henry fall asleep in the compartment, and Constantine is in the corridor. Suddenly, he comes back very upset, sits on Henry's feet, and wakes them both up. "I just stumbled into the girl who was the first real love of my life", he says. "She is from Shabats, just as I am, and we went to school together, we were meant for each other. It would have been great for me if I had married her. But she would not have me. When I left Shabats to go to the Sorbonne, she was glad to see me going... When I saw her just a few minutes ago, I asked her - why? I was handsome, my father was rich, I was a poet and a *Wunderkind*, but you didn't want me, even though you loved me. Why? And do you know what she said? 'There is too much of you! You talk more than anybody else, you play the piano more than any other person does, you love more than anybody else, and it's all too much, too much, too much'." Constantine is desperate, he doesn't understand how there can be too much of a good thing. Rebecca tries to comfort him, Henry gives him the last drop of his brandy. Soon all three of them fall asleep, leaning on each other, with Rebecca in the middle.

As they arrive at Belgrade station, they are introduced to Constantine's wife Gerda. From that moment on, their travel and their relationship will never be the same.

As Constantine hugs her, she looks at Rebecca.

...

In Kalemegdan museum, they see the car in which King Alexander was killed in Marseille. 'It is an old-fashioned vehicle. The French chauffeur had protested against being made to drive a king in such a piece of a wreck of a car,'— says Henry. 'It is a suitable symbol of the way Western powers treated the Balkans.'- Rebecca replies. As they are looking at the gunshot holes on the seat, Rebecca trembles.

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Skoplje is town of contrasts.

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And it is really Eastern. “he East is like a drug,” says Constantine, “you give yourself an injection, and you somehow spend a delightful day. Nothing really happens, but every tiny incident becomes interesting, even the routine ones are enjoyable in an unexplainable way.” Gerda overhears Constantine, and looks at him in shock. Constantine smiles.

...

Constantine takes Henry and Rebecca to house of Militsa and Mehmed, ‘one of the most remarkable couples in the country’. In the evening, they will take Rebecca to see the rites of St. Georges’ Eve.

After tea with Mehmed and Militsa, Henry and Constantine leave, and Rebecca stays, fascinated by Militsa, an intellectual with a degree in philosophy and a writer. Rebecca feels that Militsa is a version of herself, caught in a different society. Two women immediately click, and share same emotions and positions in a world controlled by men. They also share the same fear of the upcoming war, they are more aware of the danger than the others. Mehmed is a tall, handsome Bosnian Moslem, a Sorbonne graduate and a democrat whose political career is at a standstill because of the current government. Their mixed, Christian-Moslem marriage is one of the finest examples of Yugoslav intellectuals’ (antinationalistic) dream.

As the night falls, Militsa and Mehmed lead Rebecca to the outskirts of Skoplje, to see various rites and rituals devoted to St. George.

First they stop at the Moslem sanctuary of the mystic Bektashi dervish order. It is a women’s rite. A big black stone, seven feet high, is in the middle of the room of a little house. “If a woman makes a wish tonight and her fingers meet while she is embracing this stone, her wish will be granted.”, Mehmed explains. Most women wish for fertility. Given the size of the stone, it seems that only very few of them can achieve this goal. They watch women passionately embracing the stone, kissing it afterwards and retreating. Rebecca and Militsa do the same. Rebecca asked Militsa what was her wish, and Militsa replied: “I wished for a terribly drastic political change”.

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They travel to Sheep’s Field, some miles away, to see the main rite taking place at the break of dawn.

In the middle of the field is just one flat-topped rock, six feet high, and entirely covered with blood of the animals sacrificed during the night. There are chicken heads all around. Dozen of men are sitting, and there are several babies next to them, and a couple of lambs. On the top of the rock, a man is wearing a fez and holding a knife. A dressed-up Gipsy gives a black lamb to the man on the rock, takes his baby, and walks three circles around the rock, while holding the baby. The man on the rock sacrifices the lamb. Blood is spilled on the rock. The father of the baby dips his finger in blood, and makes the sign of a circle on the baby's forehead.

Rebecca and Militsa are disgusted by what they see. "He is giving a lamb to the rock because his wife's wish for a child came true. All the children who are born this way must be brought back to the rock and marked by its sign", a bearded Moslem explains.

As they leave, Militsa is sick, and Rebecca is angry, deeply outraged because she recognizes the violence of this ritual. She is outraged as a feminist, but also because of her fear of war. "If there was a woman whose womb could be unsealed by witnessing an act of violence, by seeing a jet of lamb blood, her fertility would be the reverse of motherhood, she would have children for the purpose of hating them", she says. "I know this rock well. I've lived under its shadow my entire life. The Western thought is founded on this repulsive pretence that pain is the proper price for any good thing."

In the purple light of dawn Mehmed drives Rebecca and Militsa back to Skopje. Rebecca has a vision: groups of people, scattered on the plain and walking back, look like defeated armies on a terrible battlefield. The sound of motor cars resembles the tank roar and the screams of many human voices.

Tomorrow, Rebecca, Henry, and Constantine leave for Kosovo. Rebecca is not revealing to Henry or Constantine what she has been through. Henry got some bad news from Berlin: friends he knew disappeared a few days ago. Constantine is also in a bad mood...

They look at a monument, the memorial to soldiers fell in the battles for Kosovo in 1389 and 1912. Two young soldiers, a Serb and a Croat, are guarding the memorial. The Serb is from Constantine's hometown, and he recognizes him as a famous poet, which makes Constantine proud and happy again. They talk to the

soldiers, who are good friends, and who tell them how they overcame the prejudices they had about each other. “They were born under different flags and had to beat down a wall of lies before they could smile at each other”, says Rebecca to Constantine.

As Henry walks around and looks at the mausoleum of a Sultan who was killed in the battle for Kosovo, Rebecca and Constantine are sitting on the bench near an old Albanian shepherd. Rebecca and Constantine look at the field, where the ultimate sacrifice of the Serbian army in the battle against the Turkish Empire took place. The whole Serbian army was slaughtered, Prince Lazar was killed, and his choice of ‘heavenly kingdom’ instead of ‘earthly kingdom’ became the central folk myth.

For a moment Rebecca and Constantine feel close to each other again, like weary partners who went through a lot during this voyage.

“I don’t understand this concept of sacrifice and defeat. You live by it as well. You bared your throat for Gerda’s knife, you offered your loving heart to the service of her hate...,” says Rebecca. “And you prefer the secure shelter of a formal and unfulfilling relationship?”, replies Constantine, as Henry approaches and joins them.

“Yugoslavia is always telling me stories about one death or another, the death of Franz Ferdinand, the death of king Alexander, or the death of Prince Lazar. Yet this country is full of life. But perhaps the West is ignorant about life because it avoids thinking about death.

...

They drive across a very high mountain, where the old Turkish border was, and enter Montenegro. The scenery is magnificent. The road takes them down the mountain and soon they come to Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro.

...

The ferry arrived and Rebecca and Henry have to say goodbye to Constantine. There is uneasiness and grief. They all feel they will be divided, and Rebecca knows that she will lose Constantine. It is not just that the danger of war is closing up on them; they feel that this is the end of a beautiful friendship. As the ferry is leaving the

harbor, Rebecca is looking at Constantine's figure on the quay becoming smaller, while Henry discreetly looks at her, and her look toward the quay.

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They arrive in Dubrovnik, and take a train to Zagreb.

In Zagreb they think that it is some kind of holiday because the shops are closed and people are on the streets. But there are black flags on the windows. They find out that it is the day of the funeral of the three Croats who were killed by the gendarmes. A mass riot starts, and frightened peasants are collecting their goods and fleeing the market, the fruit is falling off the stalls. Rebecca and Henry witness the beginning of the Croat separatist conflict with the Yugoslav gendarmes. It is an overture of a civil war.

They take the first train to Budapest.

Back in England Rebecca is obsessively writing the book about Yugoslavia, which is based on her notes, sketches and drawings, and on Henry's photos. The effort is taking up months and months of her time, and book is more than 1000 pages long. She finds peace in this obsession, and Henry is satisfied. ...

Her son visits her, tells her he is getting married, and they are finally getting along. He looks around her big study, stuffed with pages, images and things from Yugoslavia and she explains that, as a young child, she dreamed about the landscapes she found in Yugoslavia.

As the war is spreading throughout Europe, the writing of this book is her shelter, even though she doubts anybody will publish it. She often dreams she will wake up in towns like Yajtse or Mostar.

Finally she finishes the book, late in the night. It is March 27th 1941. In the morning she wakes up and turns on the radio. She hears that there has been a *coup d'Etat* in Yugoslavia, and that the young King Peter II, the son of King Alexander was put on throne, because the nation protested against signing the pact with Germany. The country chose to stand up to Germany, even though it was obvious it had no chance to win. The coup was helped and supported by the English contacts in Yugoslavia.

Rebecca stands by the window and looks at the garden. Henry is there, speaking with the gardener, who is standing with his two small daughters. The

announcer on the radio says that the people in Marseilles, in occupied France, wanted to carry the flowers and wreaths to the place where King Alexander was assassinated, but the police would not let them enter the street. So they got on trams, and tram drivers drove very slowly so the people could throw the flowers on the spot where the King of Yugoslavia had been killed.

Rebecca watches Henry walking towards the house, and the gardener telling something to his girls, who burst in laughter. For a moment the gardener looks like Constantine...

Yugoslavia was attacked and occupied by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria in 10 days.

Constantine was sent to a camp in Germany, and Rebecca and Henry sent him parcels through the Red Cross.

After the war he lived in Belgrade with Gerda and his two sons, in total isolation because of the new communist regime.

During the war Rebecca and Henry supported the Yugoslav royal government in exile, and their home was a shelter for many Yugoslav refugees.

“Black Lamb And Grey Falcon” became the central book of Rebecca West’s life. It was forbidden in Tito’s Yugoslavia, and it wasn’t translated and published until 1987.

During the conflicts in the 1990s, it was an obligatory reading for all the Western diplomats sent to the region.

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Белешка о тритменту² за тв серију и филм – „Ребека Вест: Црно јагње и сиви соко“

Идеја да обимна путописна (и не само путописна) књига Ребеке Вест *Црно јагње и сиви соко* може бити узбудљива основа за ТВ серију датира још од 1988/89, када су фрагменти књиге, у преводу мог оца Николе Кољевића, објављивани у *Књижевним новинама*. Главни уредник Телевизије Сарајево, Слободан Терзић, био је заинтересован да ЈРТ у копродукцији са ВВС-ијем покрене тај пројекат. Није се далеко одмакло у преговорима (осим једног мог састанка са уредницима ВВС -а 1989, када сам као студент драматургије проводио лето у Лондону радећи 'на црно' као кувар у ресторану). У околностима које су брзо почеле да се мењају код нас, пројекат тог обима није било могуће реализовати.

Средином деведесетих – када је књига Ребеке Вест стекла нову популарност у светским оквирима – Терзић, сада уредник у драмском програму Телевизије Београд, опет ме је контактирао са идејом да покренемо ову копродукцију, али је и даље пројекат био преамбициозан за логистичке и остале капацитете ТВ Београд.

Тритмент који се овде први пут објављује написан је у јесен 2010, на енглеском језику, када је трећи пут, и овај пут најозбиљније, покренута иницијатива да се ова филмска прича реализује. За пројекат се, преко Терзића и Анђелке Влаисављевић, заинтересовала продуценткиња Габриела Тана, која је у то време у Београду продуцирала филм „Кориолан“ Реифа Фајнса. Габриела Тана је прибавила (на одређено време) права за филмску адаптацију књиге и ангажовала ме да напишем тритмент. Нјен план је био да заинтересује ВВС или Channel 4 за мини-серију и филм... То је за сада крај приче о овом пројекту. А можда ће се прича једног дана наставити.

За писање тритмента, поред књиге *Црно јагње и сиви соко*, користио сам и одличну биографију Ребеке Вест, чија је ауторка Викторија Глендининг, као и различите материјале о Станиславу Винаверу (њеном водичу Константину у књизи), и југословенској књижевној, друштвеној и политичкој сцени тог времена.

² Прозни текст, нека врста преднацрта за сценарио.