

In a Time of Drought

Selected Writings 4: The Balkan Trilogy, Part 2

RICHARD BERENGARTEN was born in London in 1943, into a family of musicians. He has lived in Italy, Greece, the USA and former Yugoslavia. His perspectives as a poet combine English, French, Mediterranean, Jewish, Slavic, American and Oriental influences.

Under the name RICHARD BURNS, he has published more than 25 books. In the 1970s, he founded and ran the international Cambridge Poetry Festival. He has received the Eric Gregory Award, the Wingate-Jewish Quarterly Award for Poetry, the Keats Poetry Prize, the Yeats Club Prize, the international Morava Charter Poetry Prize and the Great Lesson Award (Serbia). He has been Writer-in-Residence at the international Eliot-Dante Colloquium in Florence, Arts Council Writer-in-Residence at the Victoria Centre in Gravesend, Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge, and a Royal Literary Fund Project Fellow. He has been Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame and British Council Lecturer in Belgrade, first at the Centre for Foreign Languages and then at the Philological Faculty. He is currently a Bye-Fellow at Downing College, Cambridge, and Praeceptor at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. His poems have been translated into more than 90 languages.

By Richard Berengarten

THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF RICHARD BERENGARTEN

Vol. 1 *For the Living: Selected Longer Poems, 1965–2000*

Vol. 2 *The Manager*

Vol. 3 *The Blue Butterfly* (Part 1, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

Vol. 4 *In a Time of Drought* (Part 2, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

Vol. 5 *Under Balkan Light* (Part 3, *The Balkan Trilogy*)

POETRY (WRITTEN AS RICHARD BURNS)

The Easter Rising 1967

The Return of Lazarus

Double Flute

Avebury

Inhabitable Space

Angels

Some Poems, Illuminated by Frances Richards

Learning to Talk

Tree

Roots/Routes

Black Light

Croft Woods

Against Perfection

Book With No Back Cover

Manual: the first 20

Holding the Darkness (Manual: the second 20)

Holding the Sea (Manual: the third 20)

AS EDITOR

An Octave for Octavio Paz

Ceri Richards: Drawings to Poems by Dylan Thomas

Rivers of Life

In Visible Ink: Selected Poems, Roberto Sanesi 1955–1979

Homage to Mandelstam

Out of Yugoslavia

For Angus

The Perfect Order: Selected Poems, Nasos Vayenas, 1974–2010

In a Time of Drought

Selected Writings

Volume 4

The Balkan Trilogy : Part 2

RICHARD BERENGARTEN

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contains some textual corrections.

*For Arijana
and to all my friends
throughout and out of Yugoslavia*

Dodole, f. pl. several girls who, in the summer, when there is a drought, go through the village from house to house, and sing and call on rain to fall. One of the girls gets completely undressed and, thus naked, lines and ties herself up in various grasses and flowers so that not a single part of her skin can be seen, and she is called *dodola* ('She has turned herself into a dodola'—is said of a girl or a woman who has adorned herself right up to her head): then they go around from house to house. When they arrive in front of a house, then the *dodola* dances alone, while the other girls stand in a row and sing various songs; after which the housewife, or some other member of the household, takes a bucket or a pitcher of water and pours it over the *dodola*, and she meanwhile dances, all the while turning around. In the *dodolske pesme* ('rainmaiden's songs' –tr.), at the end of every verse they sing a refrain which goes something like this: *oy dodo! oy dodole*, e.g.

Our doda prays to God, oy dodo! oy dodole!
To pour down dewy rain, oy dodo! oy dodole!

The *dodolas* dance nowadays throughout nearly all of Serbia from Valjevo down to Timok. Around Srem, Bačka and Banat they used to dance until quite recently, but the new priests have forbidden and uprooted the custom.

VUK STEFANOVIĆ KARADŽIĆ
Serbian Dictionary, First Edition, Vienna, 1815

Of outsiders' views on Balkan problems we are, most of us, tired.

EDITH MARY DURHAM
High Albania, 1909

I had not before shown any great curiosity as to what we were to see that evening, for the reason that I had always found it a waste of time to try to imagine beforehand anything that Yugoslavia was going to offer me.

REBECCA WEST
Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, 1940

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Editorial Note

In a Time of Drought is the fourth volume in the ongoing series of Richard Berengarten's *Selected Writings* and the second part of his *Balkan Trilogy*. For more than twenty-five years, the author has maintained a close involvement with the life, culture and politics of the Balkans. He lived and worked in former Yugoslavia at a crucial time, between 1987 and 1991, immediately before the wars that broke the country apart. Out of this have come his three Balkan collections, including this single book-length poem in seven sections.

In a Time of Drought is based on the pan-Balkan rainmaking ceremonies, which survived into the last quarter of the twentieth century. Their key figure is the Balkan rainmaiden, who goes by many names but is best known as *Dodola* or *Peperuda*. The book includes a postscript, with a copious glossary and notes that explore the background of the rainmaking customs. The first publication of this book in Serbian (RAD, Belgrade, 2004) was awarded the international Morava Charter Poetry Prize in 2005. The first English edition appeared in 2006, under the name Richard Burns. For the revised subsequent editions, the poet has repossessed his ancestral name.

I For Dodola (I)

In Memory of Desanka Maksimović

I

Who on the Spring Lord's holiday
Shall be called out as Queen of the May

Who shall be stripped and dressed in green
The fairest young woman that ever was seen

Who shall wear shoots of grasses and corn
The fairest young woman that ever was born

And who shall wear spring flowers in her hair
The fairest young woman anywhere?

*Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day*

II

Who shall be chosen as our Dodolka
Who shall be chosen as our rain maiden

Who shall be this year's Ladaritsa
Guardian of cornfields and growing gardens

And who Perperuna the butterfly
Fluttering around iris blooms

Attendant on Perun Lord of Rain
Festooned in purple and white lilac?

Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day

III

Who fairest young woman ever born
Shall wear pear blossom and sprig of hawthorn

Who shall be taught the secret speech
Of myrtle and poplar birch oak beech

And who blessed by lark and honey bee
Shall be revealed as woman and tree

And who'll bring back our golden time
Adorned in leaves of maple and lime?

Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day

IV

And who shall be our rainbow shaper
Gathering foxgloves from the hedgerows

Windflowers and bluebells from the spinney
Bending and twisting off fronds of willow

Evergreen laurel by the wayside
Sprays of black and white cherry in blossom

For garlands to bind into her hair
Wreaths to scatter onto the stream?

Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day

V

Who'll sway on a swing all night through
And at daybreak wash her face in the dew

Then with more daughters in her train
Dance for the clouds to send down rain

On thirsty fields and now and ever
Bless our work and hard endeavour

To bring in golden summer treasure
And count for us and weigh the measure?

Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day

VI

And who'll sew kingcups onto our river
Death-cleanser and life-giver

Who'll thread lilies into our stream
For the souls we'd recall if we could and redeem

Who'll braid peonies into our brook
One for each soul Death took

And with their petals embroider the water
Whose daughter whose daughter?

*Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day*

VII

And who'll drape lilac over our gate
To tell Death to hide and wait

Who'll toss marigolds onto our roof
To offer life our living proof

And who will take a cross from the grave
Of a pauper a beggar or a slave

And dip it in clean running water
Whose daughter whose daughter?

Hey Dodie fetch her away
Peperuda Perperuna
Hey Dodie Dodie Day