

Sartrean Existentialism and Lacanian Dialogic Intersubjectivity in the Novella *Concentric Circles*

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The novella *Concentric Circles* was published in a bilingual Serbian and English edition at the end of 2000 in Užice. Mila Filipović and Snežana Bošković are the authors of the book. The women's authorship has not attracted my particular attention so much as their existentialist mode of writing, which struck me on the very first pages of the novella.¹ To my knowledge, the label "existentialist" has not been recently applied to any Serbian Postmodernist literary work. Existentialist philosophy,² which has its roots in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and its chief twentieth-century exponents in Sartre and Heidegger, has found widespread expression in Modernist and Postmodernist literature, including Serbian literature. Certainly, Filipović and Bošković's novella is a salient example in point. I would like to analyze, on one hand, some aspects of their existentialism, and, on the other hand, their dialogue form as the central structure of the novella, which reveals subjectivity and a specific enactment of the inherently dialogic nature of our existence.³ The authors are highly conscious of the status and role of language. They strive to introduce a new mode of expression—a new form of the novella—into Serbian Postmodernism. I associate Filipović and Bošković with those authors who created the so-called *nouveau roman* on the European literary scene in the second half of the twentieth century. I will address both innovations the authors of *Concentric Circles* brought to the Serbian novella at the very end of the twentieth century.

¹ This paper is based on my speech delivered at the promotion of M. Filipović and S. Bošković's book in Chicago on December 17, 2000.

² Soren Kierkegaard introduced a novel usage of the term "existence" by having it applied uniquely to human existence. It functions as a determination of the human self as a process of becoming within the finite structures of time and space. "To exist" is the peculiar and distinctive way to be characteristic of human beings, a way to be that is always becoming. See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press), 1983.

³ The modern theoretician of dialogue is Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's theory of dialogue will be discussed later in this study, especially in its second part.

In their novella *Concentric Circles*, Filipović and Bošković express their concern with the search for the self. The novella is about the enigma of the self. It is a major and unifying theme, which the protagonist, Dunja, raises in the sixth chapter of the first part of the novella: "...can one flee anywhere from oneself? And can you find yourself anywhere, except deep within yourself, irrespective of where you are?" At the end of the same chapter, Dunja repeats the same idea: "You cannot find yourself anywhere. Except within yourself. And you cannot, unfortunately, flee from yourself, such as you are. Whatever the reasons for flight."⁴ Traditionally in existentialist literature, the self is given and freedom is its goal. For Sartre, freedom is given⁵ and the self is its goal. This aspect of the novella indicates that an application of Sartre's existentialist theory will be the most appropriate one in interpreting the novella. These quotations assert that the self in *Concentric Circles* is psychological and is grasped in man's "invisible interior life": "And can you find yourself anywhere, except deep within yourself." This claim strengthens the case for a Lacanian reading of the novella as well. Or, more precisely, the identities of the self are examined against the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, which proposes that the formation of identity has a specific progression initiated by the "mirror stage" and that the constitution of the self ultimately happens in language. At this point, it suffices to quote Lacan's well-known proposition that "what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language."⁶ Since the novella *Concentric Circles*, whose domain is language, has as its subject the 'self,' and since psychoanalysis, whose concern is the 'self,' has as its subject the *language of the self*, it seems very well suited to provide an interpretation in Lacanian terms and to rely on Lacan's concept of the *ego* and "the premise that one's identity is a text formed mainly by language."⁷ The language/self connection is placed in the very center of the novella *Concentric Circles* as my further analysis will reveal. Therefore, I analyze first the content of the

⁴ Mila Filipović and Snežana Bošković, *Koncentrični krugovi: Uputstvo za upotrebu Amerike i zloupotrebu svog života* (Užice: Kadinjača, 2000). The English translation is published in the same book: *Concentric Circles: Instruction for Decoding America and Destroying Your Life*. Seka Palikuća translated the novella into English. *Concentric Circles* contains 118 pages of the Serbian text and 118 pages of the English translation (this is a bilingual edition, with pages in the original facing pages in translation). My quotation is on pp. 35–36.

⁵ Hazel E. Barnes, *Sartre* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1973), 31–47.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), 147.

⁷ James M. Mellard, *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), xi.

novella against Sartre's existentialist theory which seems to underlie the novella. Then, the dialogic⁸ form of the novella is read in the context of Lacan's dialogic intersubjectivity.

I. Dunja, the novella's protagonist, emerges as the figure experiencing a crisis of subjectivity. She is an intellectual woman, one who ponders her life in philosophical terms on one hand, and on the other, she is a "faceless" woman, hard to identify. Filipović and Bošković give us no physical description of Dunja, so she is formed by our imaginations as we see her. Dunja's face is not significant because the essence of her existential problem is rooted in other themes. First of all, Dunja fell in love with a married man and made a hell, a chaos, of her life, "enabling him [the married man] to have a life and a half and her only half of life and letting him spit on his 'terrible marriage.'"⁹ At the end Dunja's life "was transformed only into waiting—for a door bell to ring, or a telephone call."¹⁰ Her life almost seems to fade before she lives it. Over the course of her nightmare relationship with the married man, her womanliness, her strength, was compromised. As long as she sees herself as a victim of her father's behavior, she cannot become a fully constituted woman in the world. Her father's moral transgression has become Dunja's destiny: Her father had had an extramarital affair from which a girl was born who was three months younger than Dunja. The newborn girl's mother, "despised, shamed, and unable to completely stifle the love towards a man who can't be a father to her child," was compelled to leave her native small town in Serbia, leaving her one-month old daughter with her parents. This event left an indelible impact on Dunja and determined her life.

The authors of *Concentric Circles* consider Dunja to be predestined to fall madly in love with a married man who is faithful to his marriage, lies to

⁸ "Dialogic" is Bakhtin's term. It is used here in the same sense in which Bakhtin uses it. Bakhtin sees truth as intersubjective, dialogic; dialogue is the means of full self-knowledge. Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's works as "a word about a word addressed to a word" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. C. Emerson [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984], 266) anticipates strikingly Lacan's claim that the subject, "c'est ce que le signifiant représente, et il ne saurait rien représenter que pour un autre signifiant, à quoi dès lors se réduit le sujet qui écoute" (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* [Paris: Seuil, 1966], 835). Although the knowledge Bakhtin sees as resulting from dialogue is generally ideological or moral, and as such is far removed from the irrational desiring self revealed by the Lacanian dialogue, dialogues like those of Ivan Karamazov and Smerdyakov operate along more Lacanian lines. In these, Ivan's will is properly unconscious, "hidden even from himself," and is recognized by him, "dimly and ambiguously at first and then clearly and distinctly [...] in another person" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 88).

⁹ Filipović and Bošković, 48.

¹⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 48.

Dunja, and loves her simultaneously. He torments Dunja and Dunja tortures herself. Finally, Dunja feels compelled to run much further abroad than even her father's former mistress. This aspect of the novella contributes to the general atmosphere of determinism pervading the entire work; it is the problem which I will address after first analyzing the content of *Concentric Circles*.

Dunja reveals her personal story to the reader only in the ninth letter. The entire letter is the classic story of a woman, becoming at the same time the universal story of "Her," in which numerous women of all races, nationalities, and epochs have participated. Dunja's personal story is an excellent example illustrating "that the universal enters History as singular, to the extent to which the singular establishes itself there as universal."¹¹ Dunja's story is presented in a succinct way and possesses general attributes of any Woman who is the eternal object-victim of seduction, and Dunja's lover has all the typical qualities of Man, the eternal seducer-victimizer. One should not be led to mistaken conclusions by the fact that the authors of the novella under investigation are women and expect them to express any aspect of contemporary feminist thought. From a strictly existentialist point of view, the authors consider Dunja fully responsible for her actions, which she has determined by herself. Dunja speaks in a rather traditional language, defining her state of mind as follows:

I am crazy. From all the dilemmas shackled in me. Afraid of the truth of my own life and paralyzed by the fact that you don't know even a part of that truth. I am incapable of such little-needed stories of myself. For confessions. How to confess to you without blushing? In the dark of my room. Over the sheet of this paper. Asking you to understand. And to forgive.

Not my sins. I chose them. My insincerity, because I was forced into it. Because everything in my double life was forbidden, shameful, taboo, wrong and I was unable to stop the agony.¹²

Her feeling of anguish brings Dunja to bad faith¹³ and to insincerity. Sartre connects insincerity, lying, with bad faith. Speaking about bad faith

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'Universel singulier," *Galleria* 17, nos. 3–6, May–December 1967, 256–58. Cf. Peter Caws, *Sartre* (London/Boston/Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). Also, on the role of individual personality as "the absolute... the unity of the universal and the particular," see Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, II, 265.

¹² Filipović and Bošković, 47.

¹³ Sartre defines *bad faith* as follows: "If I am my anguish in order to flee it, that presupposes that I can decenter myself in relation to what I am, that I can be anguish in the form of 'not-

and the lie in Sartre's philosophy, Francis Jeanson says: "Bad faith is first of all not mere lying. Or, if you will, it is a lie to oneself, which differs considerably from the lie *simpliciter*. The latter always implies a real separation between deceiver and deceived. 'Bad faith,' on the other hand, essentially implies the unity of *one* consciousness."¹⁴ A situation may elicit it, but it does not come to consciousness from without. Consciousness neither undergoes bad faith nor falls victim to it, as with a deception. Instead, consciousness "affects itself with bad faith. This requires an initial intention and a project of bad faith.... I must be aware, in my capacity as deceiver, of the truth concealed from me in my capacity as deceived.... And all this occurs not in two different temporal moments... but in the unitary structure of a single project."¹⁵

being it,' that I can dispose of a nihilating power at the heart of anguish itself. This nihilating power nihilates anguish in so far as I flee it and nihilates itself in so far as I am anguish in order to flee it. This attitude is what we call *bad faith*. There is then no question of expelling anguish from consciousness nor of constituting it in an unconscious psychic phenomenon; very simply I can make myself guilty of bad faith while apprehending the anguish which I am, and this bad faith, intended to fill up the nothingness which I am in my relation to myself, precisely implies the nothingness which it suppresses" (*Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956], 44). Sartre and other existentialist writers believe that man generally feels unable to face the truth about himself and seeks various modes of escape. In their opinion, man is insecure and isolated. The existentialists are pessimistic in their view of the human situation. Speaking about bad faith and the serious world, Hazel E. Barnes says: "Essentially the position is this: that man cannot bear the realization that all the values he lives by, his purposes, his projects are sustained by his own free choice; he finds it too great a strain to accept sole responsibility for his life. Therefore he takes refuge in the belief that somehow the external world is so structured that it guarantees the worth of its objects, it provides specific tasks which have to be done, it demands of each person a definite way of living which is the *right* one. Whether God, Nature, or a transcendent Society is responsible, the order of things is absolute. It is a *serious world*" (Hazel E. Barnes, *The Literature of Possibility: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959], 48–154, esp. 48). Also see Robert V. Stone, "Sartre on Bad Faith," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle, IL: Open Court), 1981.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 49. Francis Jeanson quotes here the 1966 edition of *Being and Nothingness* and refers to p. 89 in his book *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, trans. Robert V. Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 127.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 49; in the 1966 edition of *Being and Nothingness* the quotation is on p. 89. Analyzing Sartre's concept of bad faith, Jeanson concludes that "the subject is his own conscious behaviors inasmuch as he can so attest, but is not those behaviors inasmuch as he undergoes them and must engage in scientific conjecturing to discover their meaning. Clearly, though this account does not explain bad faith. Instead, it substitutes for bad faith 'the idea of a lie without a liar, and it explains how I can be lied to in the absence of any lying'" (*Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, 127–28). Jeanson explains that traditional ethical theory supposes that there is a living morality to be described, even if only as a requirement of

Thus, Dunja does not ask forgiveness for her action, for falling in love with the married man (it is, certainly, beyond her control and power), but for “her insincerity, because she was forced into it.” The last words can be interpreted as Dunja’s surrounding society refusal to tolerate this kind of relationship between a free woman and a married man. Although the authors do not use the harsher language of important strands of contemporary feminist thought, they clearly reproach Dunja’s traditional way of describing her love affair. They gently rebuke Dunja through Ana’s words, and Ana does not know what should be done to stop Dunja’s pain. Thus, Ana says:

Would the knowledge of his suffering soften your own? Even that is not to be condemned, but it is little. In fact I admire your strength and readiness to put an end to the waiting and that form of love which, in its basis, is not natural. Honestly, in your soul, you need not deny it. Poverty is to be without it, even such as it is, because if there were just two warm, unreal moments, it justified its existence.¹⁶

The authors seem to tacitly accept that “[m]ale and female are created through the erotization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other.”¹⁷ In other words, seduction, adultery, and “misfortunate” love take place in all possible human societies. The authors seem to strongly presuppose an essentialism concerning “Her,” that is, that there is an eternal femininity in which each individual woman participates. Thus Ana continues along the same lines:

Love is so lacking. Man’s imperfection is to wish for more. It is also his misfortune. He was left without you and has also to convince himself that it was a lucky circumstance. You must know that for his fullness you must be halved. Happily for us onlookers, that did not occur.

Please, do not abandon love in yourself. It will keep you graceful and open for good energies. You will spread around you, into the ether, the most sublime waves. When we are in love, we are more

reason or as an ideal entity, whereas Sartre believes there are only abstract, alienated moralisms and declines to add on a new one. The limited space of this study does not permit me to expand on this problem.

¹⁶ Filipović and Bošković, 50–51.

¹⁷ MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence,” *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8, no. 4 (1983): 635–58, esp. 635.

beautiful in the soul. So you will again have an opportunity, real, more honest.¹⁸

These quotations need no interpretation. They clearly manifest the authors' standpoint in the areas of love, sex, and seduction. The unfortunate love story seems to have the central role in developing the novella's plot, which is written in an existential mode.¹⁹

As already pointed out, after having spent all her weekends and free time with the family man over the course of several years, Dunja's "love turned into a slow torture, interrogations, jealous scenes, prohibitions... With too many lies. He came less and less frequently. Remaining shorter and shorter. He gave no answers, but asked questions. In the end, only the minutes with him were nice. Those intimacies. Those moments when we resembled each other. Through the veins. Through the thoughts. He was everywhere."²⁰

Dunja's love experience has created deeply painful emotions and fully frustrated her. Finally, she becomes aware that she has lost herself and tries to find an exit. Since all other paths were truly barred for her, running away to America emerged as a possibility that would allow her to escape her impasse: "Slowly and silently I was finishing that wall around myself, trying to pass through it with my head."²¹ This is the first of Dunja's walls in the sense of Sartre's story "The Wall," in which Pablo Ibbieta, imprisoned, awaits execution. For him, all exits are firmly barred. Therefore, he creates a world in which not even his best memories interest him any longer.²²

Dunja's passionate love brings about emotions which are used in the novella as an action in order to "find herself," that is, to establish her own, permanent, self-identity.²³ Dunja's passionate love creates her emotional

¹⁸ Filipović and Bošković, 51.

¹⁹ Needless to say, my reading and interpretation of the novella are not from a feminist point of view or perspective (with the exception of those engaged in the same kind of existential writings). Therefore, the focus of my analysis is on the existential aspects of *Concentric Circles*.

²⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 48.

²¹ Filipović and Bošković, 49.

²² Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Wall and Other Stories*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1948).

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948). In the early period of his existentialism, Sartre stresses emotions in the context of a typical human activity. Emotion is "phenomenon of belief." Emotion has no power to move the subject unless he believes in the magical world. Sartre here comes to grips with the role of the body in emotion. The magical transformation of the world is possible only because of the twofold character of the body: it is at one and the same time "an object in the world" and "something directly lived by consciousness": "Consciousness does not

consciousness. She is obsessed with her unhappy love to such a degree that it becomes her way of “being-in-the-world”: “Emotion is not an accident. It is a mode of existence of consciousness, one of the ways in which it *understands* its ‘being-in-the-world.’”²⁴ An emotion refers back to what it signifies. And, in effect, what it signifies is the totality of the relationships of the human reality to the world. The passage to emotion is a total modification of “being-in-the-world” according to the very particular laws of magic.²⁵

Actually, her negative emotions towards her lover are a way of acting on herself. In other words, her painful emotions give Dunja strength to put an end to her passionate love. They press her to seek self-fulfillment, to make something of herself and her life. Sartre describes emotion as “a transformation of the world,” and he continues: “When the paths traced out become too difficult, or when we see no path, we can no longer live in so urgent and difficult a world. All the ways are barred. However, we must act. So we try to change the world, that is, to live as if the connection between things and their potentialities were not ruled by deterministic processes, but by magic.”²⁶ Thus, Dunja’s emotion is a way of taking action when all roads are truly barred for her in the pragmatic world. To avoid all local gossips, curses, and accusations, as well as further deceits by her lover, the married man, Dunja decides to run away and escape from her little town in Serbia and transform her world in far-away America. However, Dunja herself questions the correctness of her decision. She even goes to an astrologist to get additional support for her trip, or more precisely for running away. She admits her awareness of the futility of her escape from her current helpless and irreconcilable situation: “...[I am] always trying to tear that skin off and run far from myself, looking for the culprit. Incompetent to find it inside myself.”²⁷ At this point, she can act upon nothing but herself. Therefore, upon her arrival to America, she fabricates a “gloomy” world in which all objects are devalued:

I have not yet managed to recover from the first blow given me by America, so do not hold it against me if this letter becomes a story of a little, old provincial girl. All my preconceptions of Chicago fell into

limit itself to projecting affective signification upon the world around it. It lives the new world which it has just established. It lives it directly; it is interested in it; it endures the qualities which behavior has set up. This signifies that when, with all paths blocked, consciousness precipitates itself into the magical world of emotion, it does so by degrading itself” (pp. 75–76).

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*, 91.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*, 93.

²⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*, 58–59.

²⁷ Filipović and Bošković, 14.

the water by the time I exited the airport, and the American dream burst like a soap bubble within its first contact with their plastic. I am still amazed. For now, my greatest dilemma is: are natural flowers plastic, or are the plastic ones natural? I have the same problem with fruits, vegetables and, honest to God, with people too. Everything is plastic. To the point of perversion.²⁸

This passage echoes Sartre's hero Roquentin in *Nausea*, who no longer sees the tree or its root, or any other object, in terms of their identity, in terms of their relation to and distinctness from other objects, but in terms of their quality. All things surrounding Roquentin provoke nausea in him. The reader witnesses what happens to the world when Roquentin's consciousness begins to run down. In his diary, Roquentin describes the peculiar sensation of nausea that has overwhelmed him. He experiences how all man-made distinctions disappear and pure existence in its nakedness manifests itself:

... the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder—naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness.²⁹

In the spirit of Sartre's early writings, Filipović and Bošković regard gloom not as a negative valuation of the American environment and its different aspects of life, but rather as a neutralizing of all environmental value in Dunja's America—not a state of depression, but an overall grayness. The authors seem to be highly aware of Sartre's idea that in a valueless world one can suffer nothing: "It is a question of making of the world an affectively neutral reality, a system in total affective equilibrium, of discharging the strong affective charge from objects, of reducing them all to affective zero."³⁰

Thus, for Dunja, America had been a dream—she had been fascinated with everything she had known and learnt about America and had possessed an intense eagerness to come to it. However, once she arrived in America and her dream became actual presence, she suddenly saw many things around her—objects, people, and places—as uniformly dull and neutral:

²⁸ Filipović and Bošković, 18.

²⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1959), 171–72.

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*, 65.

They [the Americans] do not consume anything that requires the use of their brains. “Don’t think. This is America,” they amiably advise me of my bad habit of thinking. They read junk, listen to country music and run from one party to the next, perfectly organized so as not to miss any. Alienated, they try to get together. Around a table, or for any reason, but mainly they remain alone and solitary. An entire industry exists for parties—an industry of invitations, greeting cards, thank-you notes... And so in a circle. The circles being concentric.

The parties classify them. Not as loved ones or hated ones, but as the successful ones and all the others. And they like very much to be in demand. I am shocked by some types of reactions which, in our country, I had despised and thought in bad taste. Vulgar, if you prefer. They record the gifts received, so that when returning them they do not spend more. They ask one another “how was it at the funeral,” enjoying the description of the details and the degree of mourning. They have all emotions written on cards. And they buy them.

Do you want to belong to that? Do you want to transform yourself into that? Is that the noble aim to be found in life? All that you have there. And you despise it all, irrespective of what cheap form it takes...³¹

As one clearly sees, Dunja depicts certain aspects of American life in a very gloomy light, neutralizing all its values. An overall grayness embraces the whole picture of her new environment in America. Thus, Dunja does not spare the American Serbs either:

They [the Serbs] are miserable and divided, probably just as they would be on any other planet. At a misstep, lost somewhere between peasant shoes and cowboy boots, plum brandy and whisky, between the roasted pig and fat-free food. Unhappy....

Unheard-of are the stories of these foreigners. About the childhood traumas, about the clashes with the rest of the world, about the searches for oneself of any kind, about the strife with their own children who will never manage to surmount the gap between their own parents and the country in which they were born.

These people warm their links with Serbhood in churches on holidays, in bars on weekends. In between there is only a painful attempt to survive. I have an impression that in this country of foreigners they are the greatest foreigners. It is easier for the Chinese, and

³¹ Filipović and Bošković, 36.

the Mexicans, and the Poles... It is easier for all, only they are somehow handicapped.³²

All these descriptions, scattered throughout the novel, are astutely observed traits of certain aspects of American life, of the so-called “American melting pot,” and they are presented as a seemingly negative valuation, looked upon with a dim view. This American world, which until recently had appealed to Dunja and looked so magnificent in her dreams about America, is magically transformed. For Dunja, “things have changed.” It is the result of her emotional state of mind. This magical quality of gloom is everywhere:

Nothing here is neither luxurious nor different. They [Americans] differ from us only by the fact that they know what garbage is, so that watermelons do not float in the murky Atlantic.

Or do you think that this difference is sufficient to separate them from us forever?³³

Even American walls are more deaf than the walls in Serbia: “...I know that I am telling this to the walls. And they are more deaf here than there. And muter. Or I just have such an impression.”³⁴ The last sentence indicates that Dunja is aware of her emotional consciousness.

As already pointed out, her emotions become a way of acting on herself because she cannot act upon anything else but herself. Were she to reflect, she would be able to see readily enough that “things” were the same, or at least similar, in America and in Serbia, and only she had changed. Sartre repeatedly emphasizes that emotional behavior is unreflective: “Non-reflective thought is a possession,” and “in the image, thought itself becomes a thing.”³⁵ Sartre treats imagination as possession (by magical incantation, i.e., emotion) of a situation that the individual desires it to be. Possession or having is a mode of the fundamental “desire to be.”³⁶ Along these lines, Filipović and Bošković’s protagonist Dunja “lives” the magical transformation—it is the world which seems changed to her. Sartrean “magic” consists of the fact that our actions on ourselves are intended as a transformation of the world, not of ourselves. “Magic” is not efficacious—Dunja is deceived by the transformed

³² Filipović and Bošković, 85–86.

³³ Filipović and Bošković, 30.

³⁴ Filipović and Bošković, 35.

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948), 165, 162.

³⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 598–99.

world. It seems to me that Filipović and Bošković closely follow Sartre's theory of emotion and treat Dunja's emotions as the mode of her passion to achieve self-identity. They perceive emotion in the full meaning of Sartre's claim that "the emotion signifies, *in its own way*, the whole of consciousness or, if we put ourselves on the existential level, of human reality."³⁷ Since Sartre's view on self-identity is an impossible goal, it is not hard to see why Dunja's emotional-imaginary-involuntary way of attempting to achieve self-identity fails.

It is interesting to stress how often Dunja herself questions her attempt to achieve her goal. Thus, for example, in chapter sixth of the first part of the novella, Dunja writes to Ana:

How powerful these travels of ours seem. But only on paper, for I will be one of many who illustrate well the ancient Russian story about leaving, searching and finding. Not a story—an essence. About the old man and his hut, about the hundred-year nightmare, about the treasure, somewhere in Paris, under the bridge, in the vicinity of a soldier... Every night the same dream, like an invitation, an exit, a salvation. And he did not last. He sold all his poverty and went to Paris, a stooped old man. When he arrived at the place clearly described in his dream, he approached a soldier and told him why he was there. And what? The soldier laughed, softly, and said: "Eh, my old man, every night I dream that somewhere in Siberia, under a wrecked hut..."³⁸

The quoted paragraph is an astute and powerful allusion to the fact that Dunja's decision to run away is destined to fail. The idea of destiny and determinism permeates the entire text of *Concentric Circles*.³⁹ Thus, for example, Ana bluntly expresses the same idea:

³⁷ Sartre, *The Emotions*, 17.

³⁸ Filipović and Bošković, 35.

³⁹ Discussing anguish and bad faith, Jenson questions the validity of Sartre's psychological determinism: "Psychological determinism assumes a particular meaning in this light. We have already rejected it as a method. We have seen that it constitutes a behavior of flight vis-à-vis anguish, a reflection that attempts to neutralize the evidence for freedom provided by reflective intuition. "Psychological determinism, before being a theoretical conception, is first a behavior of excuse or, if you will, the basis of all behaviors of excuse.... It provides us with a *nature* that produces our acts...; at the same time, by reducing us to *being always just what we are*, it reintroduces in us the absolute positivity of being-in-itself and thereby reintegrates us into the bosom of being" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 78–79). However, psychological determinism is only a postulate or hypothesis; by itself it cannot distract us from anguish. A more concrete ef-

I am becoming more and more aware of my endurance and of my finality, so that I'm not looking for other exits. I am also aware that it's true that man carries his misfortune with himself wherever he goes, but I am trying to arrange things irrespective of the existence of happiness. Because my heart can be filled with one or two happinesses, but all the miseries of mankind are found there and they live as if they were at home.⁴⁰

Ana has a strong flash of intuition that an unpredictable and unavoidable ill luck, a kind of disaster, will befall Dunja. It will take place several days before she loses her life in an aircraft crash, as explained a few lines below: "I felt persecuted in the city today; persecuted by the thought that some things are coming on their own like meteors, and that much of that is unpredictable. Like the daily changing, falling, growing... Sometimes that scares me."⁴¹

Many strong hints are scattered throughout the novel that Dunja's attempt to achieve self-identity is destined to fail badly. All her efforts are vain. "Dunja is a useless passion," to paraphrase Sartre's expression "Man is a useless passion."⁴² An all-embracing determinism dominates the actions and thoughts of the protagonist and her *alter ego*, Ana. It seems to me very likely that Filipović and Bošković have been influenced by Sartre's ideas in general, and his determinism in particular, and they apply them in their novel: Dunja necessarily acts from a desire to be, to make "herself"; she chooses the means, her emotions, to achieve her goal. However, Dunja cannot choose the ultimate end of her action. Therefore, Dunja cannot achieve her self-identity. She is killed in the airplane accident because the authors, along with Sartre, are determinists with respect to the ultimate goal of action. Therefore, Dunja's death is presented in the novella in such a deterministic way that she does not have any control whatsoever. The reader is only informed about this tragic event from an inserted newspaper announcement about the crash of the Boeing 757:

After the crash of a Boeing 757
en route to Chicago from San Francisco
NO SURVIVORS
The aircraft crashed immediately upon
take off for reasons yet unknown.

fort of flight is involved. What is this effort and how is it able to dissimulate our anguish? We can immediately observe: I cannot suppress the anguish that I am as a freedom, and any attempt to flee it only shows that I am not ignorant of it..." (*Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, 126).

⁴⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 107.

⁴¹ Filipović and Bošković, 108.

⁴² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 615.

Among the 217 passengers was a Serbian woman.⁴³

In the “epilogue,” entitled “At the Beginning (Of Everything),” the narrator distinguishes that someone has to be responsible, or, perhaps, punished for Dunja’s father’s transgression. Thus, Dunja was determined to atone for her father’s transgression. She herself expresses this deeply rooted determinism which shapes her life:

Too much of this was loaded on me for it to be entirely by chance. Somebody⁴⁴ probably deserved this. Maybe my father. A long time ago, married, he loved and abandoned someone. Her, unhappy, sick from love and waiting, forgiving, tired of hoping. And she left. Ran away. But that sorrow and the curse of her love are now in me, around me. It strangles me in a web of *Concentric Circles*.⁴⁵

Thus, almost from her birth, and especially as her father’s favorite, Dunja felt that she was chosen to be responsible for her father’s transgression:

The three of us, each in her own way, carry this sin of his. Without a prospect of seeing the end. I know, it will finish with me. I feel it. I was my father’s son. And my father’s daughter. And because she [the father’s woman-lover] had to know it, too.

All the same. I will live with that. Alone, abandoned and here. Unprepared to deny that painful part of myself.⁴⁶

⁴³ Filipović and Bošković, 111.

⁴⁴ One encounters a similar type of family curse in Max Frisch’s *Homo Faber*. Walter Faber falls in love with Sabeth, his daughter. The novel’s focus is not on the incest *per se*, but on a similar type of family curse. The feeling of guilt is intensified after the death of Sabeth. The punishment reaches the father as well. Thus, Walter Faber also dies during an operation for stomach cancer. There are other elements that connect Frisch’s work with Filipović and Bošković’s novella. In addition to the fact that both works explore the description of “the American way of life,” the central theme of *Homo Faber* and some of Frisch’s other works is the search for identity. One encounters the same emphasis as in *Concentric Circles*: man cannot escape himself and must learn to accept himself, which is the necessary complement and counterposition of the search for identity. Dunja in *Concentric Circles* repeats the same idea: “You cannot find yourself anywhere. Except in yourself. And you cannot, unfortunately, flee from yourself, such as you are. Whatever the reasons for flight!” (35–36). Dunja’s death is psychologized in the manner of twentieth-century existentialist literature.

⁴⁵ Filipović and Bošković, 52.

⁴⁶ Filipović and Bošković, 53.

Such a kind of rigid determinism appears at the very beginning of the novella, which virtually begins with the description of the crash of the Boeing 757 on its way to Chicago from San Francisco. This is, in fact, the end of Dunja's story, which serves as an introduction to the novella. It is appropriately entitled "At the End," and it reads: "The California sky was tearing over Alcatraz. An enormous, stifling terror; the steel beast started staggering. It was burning, from sea to sky, like a blazing path of a comet. Under the gaze of the frightened inhabitants of the Bay, the Serbian soul was spilling over the Golden Gate Bridge...."⁴⁷

While Filipović and Bošković describe death in terms of individual annihilation, Sartre defines it as a facet of "being-for-others." It is, he states, "the triumph of the point of view of the Other over the point of view *which I am* toward myself."⁴⁸ The episode of Dunja's death echoes the three principal characters, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle, in Sartre's one-act play *No Exit/Huit-Clos* (which was originally titled *The Others/ Les Autres*) who are dead and in hell. The characters make a desperate attempt to gain salvation, only to discover that each is the other's hell and so it must be for all eternity.⁴⁹ The concept of hell is usually as an actual place to which one goes and is punished. Sartre's pronouncement that "hell is—other people" remained unchanged during his life. Sartre's definition of death is essential to an understanding of Filipović and Bošković's novella. Therefore, the tragic accident of the airplane crash occupies the central place in it—Dunja's death is the moment at which she ceases to be responsible for her being, the point after which other people will determine the significance of her life, and what her Other, Ana, will make of her.

In structuring their novella, the authors highlight this event, the airplane crash, presenting it graphically in two special ways as: 1. the introduction to the novella, and 2. a newspaper announcement which appears in the novella in accordance with the chronologically exposed events of Dunja's life. In order to highlight the most important messages and aspects of the novella, Filipović and Bošković insert special inscriptions into its structure. Their most important function seems to be to recount and repeat in a slightly different way the major ideas and major scenes of the novella, to underscore their specific meaning within the work. Some of these inserted materials help develop or fill out the gaps in the plot of the story. This is especially true for the

⁴⁷ Filipović and Bošković, 5.

⁴⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 540.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos, piece en un acte* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). Its English translation: *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and Lionel Abel (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

epilogue “At the Beginning (Of Everything),” which clarifies Dunja’s motivations and her decision to travel abroad, while emphasizing the strong presence of further deterministic moods in the novella. One must admit that this technique of inserting various types of inscriptions into the structure of the novella tacitly relativizes the whole work, thus encouraging the reader to consider its limitations. It allows the reader to act as an “Absolute Other” whose recognition of this finite linguistic entity alone gives it value.

My analysis has revealed that the novella *Concentric Circles* is constructed according to Sartre’s theory of emotion: Dunja’s love becomes a real nightmare and an unbearable desperation for her, and it turns her entire life upside down. This painful, intolerable feeling, which is, as any emotion, purposive, becomes a way of acting, or more precisely, initiates Dunja’s flight to Chicago and America. However, there is another emotion on which the novella is equally grounded. This is Dunja’s feeling of shame, which she expresses in very strong words in her ninth letter to Ana:

I am crazy. From all the dilemmas shackled in me. Afraid of the truth of my own life and paralyzed by the fact that you don’t know even a part of that truth.

I am incapable of such little-needed stories of myself. For confessions. How to confess to you without blushing? In the dark of my room. Over the sheet of this paper. Asking you to understand. And to forgive.

Not my “sins.” I chose them. My insincerity, because I was forced into it. Because everything in my double life was forbidden, shameful, taboo, wrong and I was unable to stop the agony.⁵⁰

The quoted fragment depicts Dunja’s feeling of shame when she reaches an impasse in her relationship with the married man, but it also contains an interesting statement. Namely, Dunja is asking to be forgiven but not for “her sins,” as “she chose them,” but rather for the insincerity into which she was forced by her bad faith. The idea that Dunja comes to realize that she is responsible for her passion is also presented in full harmony with Sartre’s views on the problem. In his lecture *Existentialism* Sartre claims: “The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 47.

⁵¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1947), 27–28.

With respect to shame, which is for Sartre another important emotion, he defines it as awareness of my “being-for-others.” In other words, shame is “shame of oneself before the Other”:

By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image in fact, would be imputable wholly to the Other and so could not “touch” me. I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick. Shame is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me.⁵²

Of course, in the social world the feeling of shame is expressed just in the way the protagonist Dunja says: “I’m crazy.... How to confess to you without blushing? In the dark of my room. Over the sheet of this paper. Asking you to understand. And forgive...,”⁵³ indicating an implicit awareness of being an object for which she is responsible, yet which she cannot efface for another.

Sartre calls shame, fear, and pride “original reactions” because these emotions are the fundamental “ways” in which I recognize the underlying basis of all my “concrete” relations with the Other. That is, through experiencing these emotions I recognize, as Sartre puts it later in *Being and Nothingness*, that “conflict is the original meaning of being-for-other.”⁵⁴ The emotions of shame, fear, and pride seem to have a cognitive function and all three are present in the novella *Concentric Circles*. It seems to me that there is not a single sentence in the novella that is construed without a special purpose. The authors follow Sartre’s theory of emotions very closely. Thus, one reads how Ana is proud of all Dunja’s involvement in various aspects of American life, including the basketball about which she writes in her letters to her:

My pride over the basketball creativity obviously did not override my feeling of helplessness and fear of some other strange games wherein the players are likewise fucked.

“The game is still on,” you used to say. Say it again and play it with quality.

⁵² *Being and Nothingness*, 222; see also Barnes, *Sartre*, 75–90.

⁵³ Filipović and Bošković, 47.

⁵⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 364.

However, you are opening the door wide for me, bringing a smile into my soul. I am forgetting that these are your experiences and I am reliving them. I believe in them. You are good at on-the-spot reporting. You are sweet, my American. Defending your homeland. An angry girl. You are not surrendering for a moment, you are attacking, scratching, entering into the heart. Chicago chick.

I don't know why you won't admit that you are a little happy?⁵⁵

All these quotations manifest various feelings of both Dunja and Ana, the two protagonists of the novel. Their feelings present themselves as a species of knowledge. It suffices to quote a brief fragment from Ana's fifth letter:

Africa smiled at me. It always provoked in me a mystical feeling of peculiarity. At present it simply conquered me. Too fast, without resistance, I plunged into its smells, colors, sounds, so happy to be able to look at it from so close. Insufficiently informed about this part of the world, I investigate.

My togetherness with climates, meridians, continents is becoming symptomatic... There is always delight before departures and anxiety at returns. But I will postpone stories of that because I wish to give you sketches of Tunisia, "the country of thrill."⁵⁶

All this information is presented in the terms of Ana's personal feelings and on the level of her own experience. Even much more, all depicted objects in the novella represent transcendent objects of Dunja's and Ana's consciousness. The authors' imaginative consciousness seeks to change the merely perceived, making up what is lacking in perception by means of imagination and what is already known, creating a "synthesis" of the cognitive and the affective. This transformation of perception by imagination is a "degradation" of knowledge; nevertheless, the object of desire becomes the object in its desired form. Imagination presents objects to us without their resistance, magically transformed so as to conform to our desires: "Desire posits an object; but this object exists only as the correlative of a certain affective consciousness."⁵⁷ Thus Sartre can say that image consciousness represents a knowledge of pure affectivity. Only in this sense can I interpret, for example, the following fragment from Dunja's fifth letter:

⁵⁵ Filipović and Bošković, 46.

⁵⁶ Filipović and Bošković, 33.

⁵⁷ Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, 102.

I don't know why I am always thinking about Cvekla* [Miloš Cvetković, a photojournalist from Užice, the recipient of an international award for photography] during my walks. Perhaps because he is the only one who could stop this empty, deserted, sandy instant, and frame it into something which the entire world would be amazed at, or which it would fear. He would make a photograph of it. Of this which reminds me only of emptiness. I never knew him well enough to uncover from where such magic comes that is in his eye and fingers. Maybe even such a moment will come.⁵⁸

Obviously, here the authors have in mind a kind of imagination that accompanies any art, including photography. The same idea is even more clearly expressed by Ana, in her ninth letter:

I imagine us in some good restaurant with fruit salads, uncontrollably laughing and baring its male virility and inadequacies, and the people around us looking on with shock. Or they fancy us, it doesn't matter, since we do not care what they think.

If we learn *these mechanisms from imagination* [my emphasis] we could happily bring life into our lives.⁵⁹

For example, Ana replies to Dunja's letter depicting a gloomy and controversial picture of American life which leads her to think of her return back to Serbia. In her reply, Ana encourages Dunja to stay in America by saying:

Flight! What a contagious word for many who had the courage to go away. What you call the meantime is in fact life itself. Its magnitude and sense are measured by the scope of our knowledge. All the books we have read are not enough to find ourselves. Experience serves that purpose. Where to glean these experiences, remaining in one spot? How many years must we slowly look for ourselves, to understand, after several decades, that, perhaps here is not the place for us?

I am amazed how cruelly you generalize a nation, forgetting or not knowing that your own nation is choking on hatred, cheating and fear. Alright. Their emotions are written in cards. You and I knew how to live them. That is a sign that you need to find people like yourself. You don't really believe in that myth of the "heavenly people," do you?

⁵⁸ Filipović and Bošković, 31.

⁵⁹ Filipović and Bošković, 51.

You, my faithful offspring of a beloved people, an intellectual, emotion and sword in one, plant and nurture the germ of a new healthy offspring capable of complete happiness and for hard times of exploration....⁶⁰

Filipović and Bošković only touch upon the importance of imagination that represents functioning of consciousness in general, but they build their novella on emotions-feelings as a purposive way of dealing with the world and “being-in-the-world,” applying Sartre’s contention that feeling has an object.⁶¹ The affective consciousness is, following Husserl’s terminology, intentional, object-directed, object-centered. Feeling envisions an object, but it does so in its own way, which is affective: “Feelings have special intentionalities, they represent one way—among others—of *self-transcendence*,”⁶² by both imaginary and emotional transformation. Filipović and Bošković accept the idea that “imaginative consciousness” is the source of this transformation of the world, as the above-quoted examples show.

My analysis up to now reveals Sartre’s influence on Serbian literature and its literary criticism and provides the framework for my interpretation of some fundamental aspects of Filipović and Bošković’s novella. I can neither pretend to explore all the ramifications of Sartre’s emotion theory nor to tackle all the points where Filipović and Bošković’s lapidary style joins forces with a complex web of existentialist and literary allusion. What I intend is that my review enables readers to read Filipović and Bošković’s text with a sufficient grasp of the key points.

II. Filipović and Bošković create a new dialogic mode of representation in the Serbian postmodernist novella. Reading the novella *Concentric Circles* involves the total dissolution of narratorial unity through the use of dialogues in its first part, “The Frame—Nine Months Earlier,” and the third part, “The Wall.” A more familiar first person narration in singular “I” and in plural “we” figures in the two introductory chapters (Dunja’s and Ana’s encounter, 7–10), and on the first three pages of the frame (13–16). The second part of the novella, “The Picture: In the Eyes of a Ghost,” is also written in first person narration, the fictional form introduced into Serbian Modernism with the publication of Miloš Crnjanski’s *Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću* (*A Journal about Čarnojević*) in 1921. The authors are highly aware of the increasingly dialogical quality of their narrative writing. They emphatically underscore their shift

⁶⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 38.

⁶¹ Sartre, *The Emotions*, 38.

⁶² Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, 98–99.

from the first person dialogic narration to Dunja and Anna's correspondence in the form of letters by inserting a special text explaining this shift (17). Any kind of correspondence, or letters, is obvious and self-explanatory evidence that one is dealing with dialogically structured texts. There is no need for any additional explanation. The authors find it necessary not only to insert the explanatory text, but also to print it in a much bigger size type-face than used in the rest of the novella. In view of the importance of the entire text on page 17 for the meaning of the novella, I will analyze it in its entirety. At this point I will quote only the first paragraph, which warns the reader of the switch to the dialogic structure of their letters:

We wrote letters continuously—me letting out that wail from my cage, which was not like the scream of Charles Bukowski. She, clinging to that old European habit to correspond, since she had learned from Danilo Kiš that a monologue is a deeply dishonest matter.

The latter idea most likely goes back to Friedrich Schlegel's words that "nobody understands himself/herself who does not understand his/her fellows. Therefore you first have to believe you are not alone."⁶³ Schlegel is the first theoretician of "reader response" or "reception theory," which has gained considerable currency during the last three decades. Schlegel considers the act of reading in the context of Romantic irony. Thus he stresses the importance of communication over expression in literary writing: "One must really communicate something, be able to share it with someone, and not just express oneself; otherwise it would be better to stay silent."⁶⁴ For Schlegel there is no such thing as the isolated or stable subject; instead, the self exists in a constant state of relationship, inseparable from other, equally relative self-consciousness as "the response of the finite subject to an experience of transcendence [...] for Schlegel [...] necessarily leads to an awareness by that subject of its dependence on other."⁶⁵ Schlegel's concept of the ironic novel as making explicit its reliance on the reader to complete what it aspires to express, articulates in aesthetic terms his belief that human consciousness can transcend its finite, limited nature through interaction with another conscious-

⁶³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 2, ed. E. Behler, J. J. Anstett, H. Eichner (Munich and Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958), 268.

⁶⁴ "Man muss [etwas] wirklich mitteilen, mit [jemandem] teilen können, nicht bloss sich äussern, allein; sonst wäre es treffender, zu schweigen" (Schlegel, 2: 158).

⁶⁵ Gary J. Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), 25.

ness.⁶⁶ Gary Handwerk has shown how this dialogical, social element of Schlegel's concept of irony is inseparable from the more familiar dimension of Romantic irony, self-reflexivity. If thought is reflective, this means that it relates—in the first instance immediately to itself, but also beyond that to a mediately accessible, infinite world of other reflective and relative consciousness. This infinite network of relations in which the subject is caught up constitutes absolute reality for Schlegel, and is something which we can know only indirectly, which is beyond immediate perception. We can attain full subjectivity only through the mediated discovery (via reflection) of our infinite relations.⁶⁷

Self-reflexivity and intersubjectivity thus merge for Schlegel in his vision of a subject located in a “medium of reflection” where its position is always relative to that of all other subjects. This medium in which we have our being takes concrete form in language: the structure of language allows us to intuit the Absolute System.⁶⁸ Understanding our position in the world in relation to that of other speaking subjects lets us grasp our incomplete nature in relation to the Absolute. Thus engaging in dialogue with our fellows offers us the closest earthly equivalent to that Absolute, the experience of intersubjectivity in the medium of language. There are clear connections here to the ideas of Jacques Lacan, the more recent and highly influential thinker on subjectivity and dialogue⁶⁹ as well as close links to the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogue:⁷⁰ “Existence is *sobytie sobytia*, the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it.”⁷¹ After this brief theoretical explanation, the second paragraph of the key message in the novel *Concentric Circles* on page 17 can be interpreted along the same lines:

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Der Begriff der Kunstskritik in der deutschen Romantik,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 14.

⁶⁷ Handwerk, 22–24.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, 36–47.

⁶⁹ Lacan's work in psychoanalysis is dedicated to foregrounding and developing Freud's focus on the analysand's use of language in a dialogue situation. For Lacan, Freud's work reveals how the subject constantly speaks his unconscious, but in a transindividual articulation which exceeds him: “L'inconscient, à partir de Freud, est une chaîne de significants qui quelque part (sur une autre scène, écrit-il) se répète et insiste pour interférer dans les coupures que lui offre le discours effectif et la cogitation qu'il informe” (Lacan, *Écrits*, 799).

⁷⁰ Both Bakhtin and Lacan are indebted to the German Romantics for their ideas on dialogue.

⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 41.

We threw away the letters, but the messages scattered throughout space; from them formed *Concentric Circles*. Inspired by many important people, events, emotions, defeats, pains, loves and smiles. Both ours and others’.

Filipović and Bošković are fully aware of being caught up in a web of relations within a linguistic order: “We threw away the letters, but the messages scattered throughout space,” making a universe of *Concentric Circles*. The authors of *Concentric Circles* clearly privilege the dialogic dimension of their language by foregrounding their work’s reliance on the reader’s response to it: “Inspired by many important people, events, emotions, defeats, pains, loves, and smiles. Both ours and others’.” The aspect of the alienation of the self through writing about herself is made especially explicit in the second paragraph of the novella’s key message due to the authors’ awareness of the intensely mediated nature of the text-reader dialogue that takes place through the process of publication and dissemination. Filipović and Bošković’s exposition of it reflects Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in which only the subject can articulate the unconscious (i.e., the supranatural Symbolic order). The fact that the unconscious both comes from without and manifests itself without (in address) means that one’s articulation of it exceeds one and is transindividual.⁷² This perception of Filipović and Bošković’s sensitivity to Lacan’s “dialectic of intersubjectivity” (a phenomenon inherent in all linguistic communication) is of course supported by the importance they place on the act of reading, itself an enactment of the intersubjective relations on which their text concentrates. They repeat the same idea in a more elaborate way in the first chapter, “Frame”:

It’s as if the entire world had become a long letter, as if they all flow into one emotion, and as if it were our only treasure. The word. And its exchange.

We gathered, sincere, emotional and talkative, to bridge all those oceans and fast rails. We sent to one another both unrest and joy, aware that this mission is totally possible. Here I am leafing through the rustling paper to offer you thoughts which were not designed only for me.

“Publish your correspondence,” said a close friend of mine who had convincingly explained to me that people do not need to be together to be united. So tightly.

⁷² Lacan, *Ecrits*, 258.

Those strong unions are probably an enormous energy which is somewhere above us as a watchman, a savior. Maybe the epicenter is somewhere over the Ocean, and maybe from there begins the net of *Concentric Circles*.⁷³

The quoted fragment explicitly reveals that Filipović and Bošković are well acquainted with the inherently dialogic nature of our existence which has been powerfully expressed in Schlegel's aesthetic principle that writing engages in a dialogue with its reader who completes it as ironic. Schlegel's concept of the ironic novel articulates in aesthetic terms his belief that human consciousness can transcend its finite, limited nature through interaction with another consciousness, and that the moment of critical *reading* represents the means of engaging fully with the very nature of being.⁷⁴ Filipović and Bošković share a conception of the text ("the entire world had become a long letter") as actualized in the reading process: "We sent to one another both unrest and joy, aware that this mission is totally possible. Here I am leafing through the rustling paper to offer you thoughts which were not designed only for me." The activity of the mind is "the alternating current of speech and counter-speech or rather of thought and counter-thought,"⁷⁵ and as such is ideally represented in dialogue form. Therefore, for Schlegel, as already stressed, dialogue as the dynamic process moves the mind beyond it, towards ever fuller knowledge and recognition of the Highest.⁷⁶ Relations outside ourselves, like events of co-beings, like "a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event..."⁷⁷ bring us closer to that Absolute. Filipović and Bošković paraphrase the same idea as follows: "The strong unions are probably an enormous energy which is somewhere above us as a watchman, a savior. Maybe the epicenter is somewhere over the Ocean, and maybe from there begins the net of *Concentric Circles*." Thus, Schlegel's "Highest" or "Absolute" has been renamed "as a watchman, a savior" in the paragraph of the novel quoted above. Filipović and Bošković refer to the same absolute reality of Schlegel and they talk about the same "infinite network of relationship" constituted through language (words, texts, letters, etc.), which they call "the net of *Concentric Circles*." To emphasize

⁷³ Filipović and Bošković, 54.

⁷⁴ I rely heavily here on Benjamin's work.

⁷⁵ "[das] wechselnd[e] Strom der Rede und Gegenrede oder vielmehr des Denkens und Gegendenkens," (Schlegel, X, 353). Quoted from Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, romantische Ironie, tragische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 64.

⁷⁶ Behler, 98.

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, 41.

the crucial importance of this vast web of interconnections among text participants and language as a privileged mode of such relations, Filipović and Bošković entitle their novella *Concentric Circles*.

In light of theoretical works on dialogue, it is stressed that in dialogue the roles of addressor and addressee are constantly in flux. Thus, dialogue—while it remains reciprocal—is more complex and even conflictual than the initial consensual conception of it might suggest. Filipović and Bošković’s writing reveals that the *ego* created in language is an inherently alienated construct. Dunja’s own words actually come from her other, Ana, in inverted form in Lacan’s terms: “L’émetteur reçoit du récepteur son propre message sous une forme inversée.”⁷⁸ This realization in turn requires recognizing the other, Dunja’s addressee, Ana, and vice versa, as an “absolute Other,” embodiment of the totality of language, as Lacan defines it:

Autre absolu, visé au-delà de tout ce que vous pourrez connaître et pour qui la reconnaissance n’a justement à valoir que parce qu’il est au-delà du connu. C’est dans la reconnaissance que vous l’instituez, et non pas comme un élément pur et simple de la réalité, un pion, une marionnette, mais un absolu irréductible, de l’existence duquel comme sujet dépend la valeur même de la parole dans laquelle vous vous faites reconnaître.⁷⁹

Although I have quoted Schlegel as the major spiritual *movens* of all theoretical disquisitions on dialogue, I consider Lacan to be the closest theoretical source of Filipović and Bošković’s writing, the major subject of which is our transindividual language, our Other. This they emphatically stress in the third paragraph of their key message of the novella:

The emotions framed themselves into a net of circles out of which one can escape, but from which there is no escaping.⁸⁰

This third key paragraph can be interpreted: human beings cannot escape the universe of communication no matter how hard they try. We live in the universe of language, in which we are bound. Filipović and Bošković fervently support the widely accepted idea that human existence in the world is indissolubly intertwined with language, that language is the foundation of Being, as Heidegger asserts in “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry.”

⁷⁸ Lacan, *Ecrits*, 298.

⁷⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire III: Les Psychoses*, ed. J. A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 62–63.

⁸⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 17.

Heidegger cogently explains how the question of Being involves us deeply in the question of language. An object is born depending on how we “name” the object, for we ourselves “exist only in the delirious illusion of language.”⁸¹ Filipović and Bošković are highly aware that we live and think in language, but not with language. Language lives and grows through our attempts to respond to reality; it is part of ourselves. Only through language do we have intimate contact with and access to things. Therefore, language is the most basic and fundamental human phenomenon. Our language sets us apart from other objects in nature.

Communication between subjects is always mediated by a relationship of the I (*moi*) to, in Lacan’s terms, a “moi autre mais semblable”: “Fondamentalement ce sont [de vrais sujets] que je vise chaque fois que je prononce une vraie parole, mais j’atteins toujours aa´ [the ‘moi-moi autre’ axis] par réflexion. Je vise toujours les vrais sujets, et il me faut me contenter des ombres. Le sujet est séparé des Autres, les vrais, par le MUR DU LANGUAGE” (my emphasis).⁸² The idea that “the subject is separated from real Others by the WALL OF LANGUAGE” (my emphasis) is the basic idea of the third part—“Wall”—of *Concentric Circles*, which seems to be most likely based on Lacan’s expression “the wall of language.” I have already discussed the same idea that was equally expressed in the third paragraph of the key message of the novella; although in the third paragraph I just analyzed the metaphorical word “wall” is not used, it is clearly understood: “[T]here is no escaping out from a net of [communication, language] circles.” However, the title of the third part of the novella, “Wall,” is not self-explanatory. In order to make it clear, the authors elaborate the idea of the “impenetrable wall of language” and make successful hints about it in the context of its individual chapters. Thus, for example, Dunja becomes more and more aware that she is alone, that her life in America has not helped her to avoid her “infinite loneliness,” her roaming, her questionings, and sufferings. She admits it:

Alone. Unnaturally separated from the world and from possible other halves. Happy for the experience and the surroundings, and entirely unhappy by the essence. Desperate and silent. And tedious, I know.

⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung,” in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), 33–48; Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin’s Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 51–65.

⁸² Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire II: Le Moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, ed. J. A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 286.

Every morning I tell myself in the mirror, “Dunja, let’s turn another circle.” She laughs at me from the mirror, but accepts the game.
 It’s time for me to accept it.
 To learn the rules, by heart, to add together the points, to break records, to win.
 I’m weak on promises, but here, I’ll admit it. I’m changing.⁸³

The entire first paragraph—“Alone. Unnaturally separated from the world and from possible other halves...”—could refer to many things in our life and, therefore, could be easily misinterpreted. To avoid this kind of misinterpretation and limit the possibilities of its interpretation to one, Filipović and Bošković add the second paragraph: “Every morning I tell myself in the mirror, ‘Dunja, let’s turn another circle.’ She laughs at me from the mirror, but accepts the game.” This scene as a kind of dialogue with oneself cogently indicates the inherently dialogic nature of human existence. The key word here is “the mirror” because the *ego* is the product of the mirror-stage, the moment in which the child first comes to see himself as a unitary entity, on the basis of his/her reflection in a mirror or of the sight of other babies.⁸⁴ Like Schlegel’s reader, Lacan’s addressee plays a central role in the developmental creation of meaning through completion of the address: “Every morning I tell myself in the mirror,⁸⁵ ‘Dunja, Let’s turn another circle,’” which means “Dunja, let us communicate, let us make interrelation between me and my mirror reflection.” “Dunja from the mirror laughs at me, but accepts the game.” In a later lecture, Schlegel formulates ego-subject distinction in terms strikingly similar to Lacan’s: “Where the thought of the self is not one with the concept of the world, one can say that this pure thinking of the thought of the self

⁸³ Filipović and Bošković, 94.

⁸⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, 93–100. It is well known that the relations between Lacan and Sartre were tense and rather unfriendly. “Although Lacanian psychoanalysis and Sartrean existentialism might appear to be polar opposites in that Lacan would probably regard the project of authenticity as simply a variation on the discourse of the Master, and in that Sartre effectively denies the very existence of the unconscious for a long time, their discourses intersect on a number of occasions. The kinship is, perhaps, most apparent in the links that can be found between Lacan’s mirror stage and Sartre’s early essay, *La Transcendance de l’ego*.” See more about it in David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 103 ff.

⁸⁵ Sartre’s biographies on Baudelaire, Genet, and Flaubert are examples of mirror writing and are primarily inverted self-images. Through a procedure of symmetrical reversal, Sartre describes himself by describing his opposites. Cf. his *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); *Saint Genet: Comedian et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952); and *L’Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821–1857*, vols. 1–3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–72).

leads only to an eternal mirroring of the self, to an endless series of mirror-images which contain nothing new but only ever the same old thing.”⁸⁶

The authors of *Concentric Circles* are conscious of the irreducible relativity of our position in the “symbolic order” that is language, which mediates the Real to us. Like Schlegel, Lacan sees the conscious self as incomplete in a totality of language where true subjectivity is located; but here it is the very experience of language which, through repression, creates a plane of our being inaccessible to us. This seems to be exactly the meaning of the first two sentences of the first quoted paragraph: “Alone. Unnaturally separated from the world and from possible other halves.” The expression “from possible other halves” should be understood as “from possible other halves of us,” which means “from our others.” Filipović and Bošković express the consciousness of the specular other as well:

I don't call my memories to my assistance. I am learning that you can't live on them. I contemplate my own reflection in the mirror and I imagine somebody on my left side. Actually, on the right. I replace the photos with head-spinning speed. I am trying to match anyone beside myself. I am changing the pictures in a blink of an eye. My eyes are wet. I give up. There is no one who would be my match.⁸⁷

Clearly, this is an attempt, in the analytic dialogue, to unseat the Imaginary self (the *alter ego*) through which subjects pose the question of identity at a level that avoids confrontation with its provisional nature. Given the shared limitations of its language and consciousness the subject can never abolish through language its historically constituted *ego*, the persistent presence of the Imaginary in its psyche. It is exactly what Filipović and Bošković claim in the quoted fragment: “There is no one who would be my match,” no matter how hard I try to “match anyone beside myself.”

After this digression I would like to return to the above quoted sentences: “Happy for the experience and the surroundings, and entirely unhappy by the essence. Desperate and silent. And tedious, I know,” which I have left without any explanation. As my analysis has shown so far, the best way to interpret Filipović and Bošković's dialogic inter-subjectivity is to rely on Lacan's writings. According to Lacan, the subject is created as a split entity, conscious and unconscious, through the mechanism of metaphor which introduces language to the child's experience. Desire is the essence of that part of us which is repressed in our unconscious. Desire in fact grounds the individual's ac-

⁸⁶ Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen*, 2: 38; cited from Benjamin, 35.

⁸⁷ Filipović and Bošković, 97.

cession to language. Thus, Lacanian Oedipus is “the assumption of a desire which is originally another’s and which in its displacements, is perpetually other than itself.”⁸⁸ The above quoted sentences articulate a human instinct, the “profound and terrible desire” to establish contact with human beings, to relate to one another in language: “Happy for the experience” of language, but “entirely unhappy by the essence.” The latter means that we are entirely unhappy by desire’s (that is the essence) repression, by its splitting (Lacan’s *refente*) constantly recurring along the chain of discourse. The product of the *énonciation*, the *énoncé*, represents only half the truth of the subject. Thus “la présence de l’inconscient, pour se situer au lieu de l’Autre, est à chercher en tout discours, en son énonciation.”⁸⁹ Along the same lines I interpret the following fragment from the third chapter, “Wall”:

I go to the coldness of my room and I escape into sleep. Looking there for some peace, of any sort. Wrong, I know, but I have only the strength to run.

Sometimes I escape into a new movie. I also find myself from time to time among you who are now walking, with your voices ringing, through the Serbian streets. Music draws me into a strange silence, but everything is unsuccessful. The same thing always awaits me, this sad and lonely me....

This is painful for you to read, isn’t it? Then I will stop writing.

That’s if you don’t dissuade me that an important part of myself will always be unhappy, because I’m here and I roam through the American lights and darkneses.

If you don’t persuade me that this unnatural state of my conscience, of my mind and body, can produce some thought worth living for.

I am in front of a wall, hard and impenetrable...⁹⁰

In the light of the previous analysis, this fragment can be understood as Dunja’s full awareness of her being separated from the rest of the world by a hard and impenetrable wall of language which causes her feelings of frustration, despair, and loneliness. No matter where she finds herself in America, she feels awfully alone. Even when Dunja runs away from reality into her

⁸⁸ Jeffrey Mehlman, “Introduction and Notes to J. Lacan,” in *Seminar on the Purloined Letter*, trans. J. Mehlman, *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 38–72, esp. 45, n. 11.

⁸⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 834.

⁹⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 97–98.

dreams and fantasies, and she is able to see herself on the streets of Užice, nonetheless, Dunja cannot escape the feeling of loneliness:

Sometimes I escape into a new movie. I also find myself from time to time among you who are now walking, with your voices ringing, through the Serbian streets. Music draws me into a strange silence, but everything is unsuccessful. *The same thing always awaits me, this sad and lonely me* [my emphasis].

Dunja, the subject, is unhappy. As she exists in language, she is split right from its origin, with the unconscious, a chain of signifiers repressed in the *ego's* engagement with substitutes. In the same way Lacan sees the subject as “ce que le signifiant représente, et il ne saurait rien représenter que pour un autre signifiant, à quoi dès lors se réduit le sujet qui écoute.”⁹¹ The idea of Dunja's complete isolation by the wall of language from the rest of the world is further elaborated in the remaining chapters of “Wall.” Thus, after having taken the aircraft, Dunja reaches if not the most beautiful city in America, then certainly one of the most beautiful, San Francisco. The entire atmosphere of the dynamic city on the hills over the Pacific Ocean, with its famous bridges and deep blue sea, is exceptionally appealing to Dunja on a warm March day. Amazed and overwhelmed by the beauty surrounding her, Dunja gladly confesses “that San Francisco could be the city for the rest of my life.” In spite of being in a state of enthusiastic excitement, Dunja, nevertheless, cannot overcome her feelings of loneliness and isolation:

Born with a need to have a collaborator, I, handicapped in my loneliness, don't have anyone to discuss the questions of courage, liberty, sins, helplessness and power with. I will have to share all my dilemmas with myself even now. Or with you, in this way, from afar and with lasting.⁹²

For Filipović and Bošković, the essence of human behavior is discourse; “Born with a need to have a collaborator,” exactly means “We are born with a need to have an other with whom we interact.” Only engaging with him gives

⁹¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 835.

⁹² Filipović and Bošković, 109. The last sentence of the quoted paragraph is not completely clear in English. It seems that one word is missing here. The same sentence in the Serbian original reads as follows: “Sve dileme moraću i sada da podelim sama sa sobom. Ili sa tobom—ovako, nadaleko i na dugotrajno” (I will have to share all my dilemmas with myself even now. Or with you, in this way, from afar, and lasting for a long time).

us access to the reality of our existence. The sentence: “I, handicapped in my loneliness, don’t have anyone to discuss the questions of courage, liberty, sins, helplessness and power with” alludes to the incapability of language to restore completely and directly empirical reality and refers directly to the “castrated” subject of language. The last two sentences of the quoted fragment clearly indicate that the authors speak about our other (our inter-subjective dialogue, or Lacan’s “dialectic of inter-subjectivity”), through which we understand him and the world, including what he knows about language in general. Speaking in concrete terms, the last sentence refers to Dunja’s *alter ego*, Ana, who is with her all the time, although from afar. Ana is Dunja’s unconscious. Filipović and Bošković let the unconscious speak in its discourse, which depends on Ana’s acting as Dunja’s other in *Concentric Circles*. In some instances the authors of the novella reveal the fact that Ana’s language is a parody of unconscious speech, a simulation of what should come into being through communication, which is only in part of a communication with the reader. Thus, for example, in the last chapter of the “Wall,” after the crash of the Boeing 757 *en route* to Chicago from San Francisco, in which Dunja was killed, her unconscious, Ana, expresses Dunja’s absence again in the Lacanian overtones and refuses to open her eyes and encounter the wall of language which does not exist in her dreams:

Christ, am I normal?! It hurts me to open my eyes, to see the wall, to distance myself from my dreams.

The suitcases are packed. The furniture is sold, given away. The pictures will wait for a happier moment. The mirrors are empty.

For days some people are circulating in this house. We say our farewells.

As already stressed, Sartre describes death in terms of being-for-others. Ana’s sentence “The mirrors are empty” indicates that she cannot see herself in a mirror. In Sartre’s ontology the mirror represents the thing which the For-itself encounters in the circuit of ipseity. The image in the mirror is the Ego and it is apprehended by consciousness as something in the world. In death, however, there can be no mirrors since the characters have become this Ego and are no longer separated from themselves by their own nothingness. These philosophical ideas are presented in *No Exit*, the most popular of Sartre’s plays, which helps to explain the meaning of the novella *Concentric Circles*. Thus, Estelle—one of the characters in *No Exit*—expresses a desire to see herself in a mirror. Like Dunja, she is assured of her existence only through a mirror. To compensate for the absence of the mirror, Inez invites Estelle to look into her eyes in order to find her reflection. But, Estelle is unable to

grasp her image there as in a mirror. This is because Inez represents not only the In-itself of death but—as a metaphor for the living—a human consciousness. Through her, Estelle experiences her objectivity.⁹³ For the three characters of *No Exit*, as for Dunja and Ana of *Concentric Circles*, being-for-others is inescapable. The source of Dunja's being is her Other, Ana, and not herself. Although Dunja is dead, she in fact continues to change, but only as a result of the action of the living Ana.⁹⁴

In an exchange reminiscent of the Lacanian dialogue, the words of Ana's voice reverberate in the totality of language:

And, I, exhaustively talkative, overburdening, keep silent. And I am happy that I am already on the path and in the moment where my impulses or breathing or lasting overflow easily and finally pour into a peaceful picture of disappearing and of rebirth.

Maybe of another person who could exist for a short time and live out everything. You are organically shifting into this process. Probably unavoidably, but as a girl, always at the edge of the circle and strangely strong and beautiful.⁹⁵

The recalled incident is further clearly intended to be read as emblematic of the protagonist's identity, as the past little girl, "at the edge of the circle and strangely strong and beautiful." Linguistic expression thus ultimately defeats the lure of silence in the quoted fragment and creates the impression that Dunja has been reincarnated. In this sense Radomir Vergović has interpreted the last chapter of the novella, and he has used this concept to graphically represent this idea of reincarnation on both covers of the book. He has drawn Dunja's reincarnation in the form of a newly growing plant from a three-branched stump. However, if one closely follows Sartre's existentialist philosophy, Dunja cannot be reincarnated: "The dead life is ... *all done*.... Nothing more can *happen* to it inwardly; it is entirely closed; nothing more can be made to enter there; but its meaning does not cease to be modified from the outside."⁹⁶ The latter idea means that Dunja is not "absolutely" dead because she is still remembered by the living Other, Ana:

⁹³ Barnes, *Sartre*, 100–05.

⁹⁴ Sartre defines death as follows: "The dead life is... *all done*,... Nothing more can *happen* to it inwardly; it is entirely closed; nothing more can be made to enter there; but its meaning does not cease to be modified from the outside"; *Being and Nothingness*, 543.

⁹⁵ Filipović and Bošković, 113.

⁹⁶ See footnote no. 94. I am surprised that Filipović and Bošković used Vergović's interpretation and put his graphical design on both covers of their published book because the image of

Two shadows, the two of us, are again spending the last days in Užice together, more uncertain than ever. Maximally wounded, very tired, I am packing my sorrow, too. I am throwing away memories to make the swim over easier.

“I am crying without fear, I am loving without love. You, naturally, not in such a way. You are somebody else, and far away. You got some part of me. In fact you are the only one possessing such a part. I cherish this part of me in you. I love it. You too.”⁹⁷

Ana is still remembering Dunja. Thus the reader has the impression of the seeming possibility of restoration of the self. The latter seems to be achieved in the previously quoted fragment of the last chapter of the novella, following the announcement about the crash of the aircraft in which Dunja lost her life. However, as explained above, the impression is false. For the time being, Dunja is part of what Garcin in *No Exit* calls the “public domain.” Absolute death comes only when the living cease to remember Dunja.

The last quotation is a striking example of the emergence of the truth of the subject in dialogue which has been echoed in Schlegel and Lacan, as well as in Roy Schafer’s analysis of the relationship between biography and the psychoanalytic dialogue.⁹⁸ In fact, in a psychoanalytic dialogue, the voice which enunciates the question and the voice which experiences the involuntary memory are not the same. Both characters, Dunja and Ana, arise through language as a being for the other character; yet each remains fundamentally free. However, both voices do ultimately belong to the same linguistic subject, which is the origin of both sides of the interlocution. Clearly, the authors are aware of that fact and explicitly express it at the very end of this quoted example: “You are somebody else, and far away. You got some part of me. In fact you are the only one possessing such a part. I cherish this part of me in you. I love it. You too.” The quotation invites, in my opinion, an interpretation that both sides of dialogue unavoidably originate in the same consciousness and so within the same linguistic limits. My analysis shows that Dunja’s otherness, Ana, is an artifice, based on Dunja’s address to herself as *ti* (informal ‘you’). Ana is Dunja’s interlocutor who represents language as a

Dunja’s alleged incarnation contradicts Sartre’s explanation of death and deviates from Sartre’s existentialist philosophy which otherwise underlies the entire novel.

⁹⁷ Filipović and Bošković, 113.

⁹⁸ Roy Schafer, “Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue,” in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 25–49.

whole (the Other). Filipović and Bošković skillfully describe Ana in terms of language:

Here I am appearing again *from the paper like Lucifer*.

I'm trying *to live my life, filling it in with a trance, as some indefinite fluid in the air, which is solid and persistent, that you may nonetheless close into a box, to change its direction with a breath and tear up with some rough object, but you cannot destroy. I am lasting and that duration has some meaning....*

This approach toward you I experience as *an idealized spirit, some fiction which is food for my soul*.⁹⁹

I am proud. *These separate worlds of ours are constantly touching*.¹⁰⁰

However I'm happy. I am touching your hands and *you are my eternal interlocutor. Since I also am lacking the sky and a shore of any kind. In my dream and beyond it*.¹⁰¹ (all emphases are mine)

These quotations do not need special explanation. No one can find a more precise way to describe the phenomenon of language than it is defined in these citations and many others throughout the novella. Dunja's other is no more than what she appears to be, encountered in language. Ana's constant participation in the dialogic intersubjectivity of the novella expresses the truth of the protagonist Dunja, of her self, her body and mind, as complex constructions within a transindividual symbolic order.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the novella has its origin in the authors' lived experience. However, it is neither wholly fictional nor wholly autobiographical. The latter aspect is problematized by the fragmentation of narration into two voices, one largely narratorial and one critical and doubting. Since my analysis has been focused only on dialogue, I have limited my discussion to the two chapters ("The Frame: Nine Months Ago" and "Wall") in which narration is presented by two first person voices: Dunja's and that of her *alter ego*, Ana. The dialogic intersubjectivity in these chapters reveals that the authors, Filipović and Bošković, resist the otherness of the reader while embodying in so much of their work that powerful desire to establish contact with the other. However, the narrating voice in the second chapter ("The

⁹⁹ Filipović and Bošković, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Filipović and Bošković, 100.

¹⁰¹ Filipović and Bošković, 104.

Picture in the Eyes of a Ghost”) appears to reject the authority as well over others’ discourses which its position as narrator offers, often choosing to represent the words of others as direct speech.¹⁰² Thus not only on the basis of the dialogic form of correspondence by letters, but also based on the representation of discourse within the first person narration in the second chapter and some other portions of the book, the novella *Concentric Circles* strives for a complete dissolution of narrative monologism. This should be viewed as the major message of the entire novella, that is, “a monologue is a deeply dishonest matter:”

We threw away the letters, but the messages scattered throughout space; from them formed *Concentric Circles*. Inspired by many important people, events, emotions, defeats, pains, loves, and smiles. Both ours and others.

The emotions framed themselves into a net of circles out of which one can escape, but from which there is no escaping.¹⁰³

Mila Filipović and Snežana Bošković should be credited for their innovative effort to introduce an ever more radically dialogic prose form in Serbian Postmodernist fiction. Their strong emphasis on dialogue and plurality of discourses, their *concentric circles*, (“polyphony,” to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term) heighten the polyphonic structure of discourse in various ways and foreground the ontological dimension of the confrontation among discourses. Their dialogic intersubjectivity conveys a world of radically fragmented perspectives as a characteristic of postmodernist fiction by and large.

¹⁰² A detailed analysis of the second chapter as well as many other innovative aspects (what happens to the authorial voice in the dialogic text of the novella, what kind of relationship is established across that text between the author and the reader; how this dialogic structure multiplies the “spacing” inherent in Filipović and Bošković’s prose style and so magnifies the role of the reader in completing the text, etc.) of the novella *Concentric Circles* exceeds the scope of my paper.

¹⁰³ Filipović and Bošković, 17.