

EXILE AND LOSS IN DAVID ALBAHARI'S NOVEL *BAIT*¹

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Abstract: The main character in David Albahari's novel *Bait* leaves Serbia and flees to Canada where he tries to start his life anew. The narrator finds himself alone and lonely, sad, troubled and completely estranged from his new surroundings, language, culture and people. The paper will primarily rely on Edward Said (2001) and Svetlana Boym's (2001) definitions and meanings of exile in which they both recognize loss as its fundamental element. This paper aims to show the complexity of loss following exile and the ways to constructively overcome it. The narrator's life in the novel is filled with different losses – that of his home country, language, his people, identity and sense of belonging. Despite all the promises of a better life that Canada seems to offer to the novel's narrator, Albahari portrays him as a man who is suffering and desperately trying to adapt to everything that Canada represents. The paper will focus on how the narrator navigates his alienation and attempts to forge a new identity in a new country whilst enduring the sadness and estrangement of his self-imposed exile.

Keywords: Albahari, exile, loss, country, language, estrangement, identity.²

1. Introduction

Bait follows a life of a nameless narrator who lives in war-torn Serbia and who, just like Albahari himself, emigrates to Canada in search of a better life. It primarily tackles the problem of exile which, along with themes of alienation, loss and identity, will be the topic of this paper. Although the main character voluntarily chooses to leave his native country, so as to avoid the inevitable horrors and hardships that every war brings with it,

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his life in Canada is nevertheless the life of an exile.

The paper will primarily rely on the theories of Edward Said (2001) and Svetlana Boym (2001), who both wrote about exile. Given that they both recognize loss as its central and underlying part, the paper will analyse exile from this perspective, taking into account all the major losses that the narrator suffers. The narrator of *Bait* experiences different types of loss, that of his homeland and its people, his native language, his identity and his sense of belonging. Each of these losses will be thoroughly discussed and analysed individually in this paper, with the aim of elucidating the self-imposed exile that the narrator finds himself in.

The paper will also examine the role of the narrator's mother, his friend Donald and the role of writing, for they all help the narrator forge his new identity and ease the trauma he experiences when adapting to the new homeland and foreign language. The paper will thus argue that the narrator, along with Donald and writing, needs to listen to the voice of his dead mother from the audiotapes in order to adapt and live his new exile life in Canada.

2. Exile and Loss

What is very interesting and even compelling about *Bait* is that both its main character and its author live the life in exile. Edward Said (2001) addressed the problem of exile and associated it with the word loss. He wrote:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever (Said, 2001; 137).

Despite the compelling allure it exerts, exile represents irrevocable estrangement, disconnection and irreparable division to an individual. It is a condition which implies sadness and loss, but also an aching void which arises from the things forever left behind. Svetlana Boym (2001) also closely examined exile. She stated the following:

The word *exile* (from *ex-salire*) means to leap outside. Exile is both about suffering in banishment and springing into

a new life. The leap is also a gap, often an unbridgeable one; it reveals an incommensurability of what is lost and what is found. Only a few manage to turn exile into an enabling fiction (Boym, 2001; 256).

The above-mentioned paragraph suggests that exile, on the one hand, implies suffering and a sense of being banished from one's homeland, while on the other, it involves a step toward embracing a new life in a new country. Both Said (2001) and Boym (2001) acknowledge that exile is somehow always connected to the loss all exiles must experience once they leave their country. Moreover, both authors emphasize that loss occupies a vital role and constitutes a fundamental part of exile, one of the major motifs in the novel. Anna Smith (1996; 22) intertwines the terms of exile and estrangement, regarding them as synonyms. Furthermore, she joins in Said and Boym's observations on exile and loss, writing the following:

But even though exile carries within its discourse the memory of a happier time when one was at home with oneself, or when it asserts a future time of reconciliation, thinking and writing about estrangement presuppose being conscious of loss and in exile from the beginning (Smith, 1996; 41).

The essential idea behind this statement is that when one contemplates terms of exile and estrangement, a sense of loss instantly emerges as its integral part and its essential component. Apart from loss, exile is also associated with other terms such as sorrow, suffering, sadness and estrangement. Other exile analysts and critics refer to it as a sort of "forced displacement" (Pavel, 1996; 306) but also as "estrangement from the origin — disjointedness, disparity, decentralization, and marginality" (Zeng, 2010; 33). It is a condition that leaves destructive and detrimental effects on those who suffer from it, as they not only undergo a string of losses in their life, but also have an existential crisis which threatens to ruin them by looming perilously over their existence and lives.

In addition to being "a condition of terminal loss" (Said, 2001; 137), exile also denotes a sort of "orphanhood", as Said (*ibid*; 144) eloquently puts it, where an individual is compelled to go through their life on their own, seeking their own path all the while struggling to find some sense in it. To understand the tragic destiny that exiles undoubtedly have, many critics associate the term with death. William Gass (1991; 90) indicates that exile "is a blow from which only death will recover us" thus

stating that the wounds inflicted by exile penetrate so deeply that death seems like the only resolution, the only release from all that suffering. No matter how hard they try to adjust to their new surroundings, an exile always remains “an outsider” (Smith, 1996; 22), excluded from the cultural, social and even geographical aspects of life.

Boym (2001; 256) further indicates that the key feature of exile is a dual consciousness, where one finds oneself consistently split between the two worlds. An exile, therefore, never really leaves the country of their origin. Although physically dislocated from their homeland, a picture of their old home, very often the only home they will ever have, remains in their imagination thus preventing them from assimilating into a new country.

While trying to adjust to their new environment and foreigners that surround them, exiles often encounter difficulties when forging new friendship and relationships for exile is always “a solitude experienced outside the group” (Said, 2001; 140) which only deepens the profound sense of loneliness, alienation and isolation they already feel. Smith (1996; 24) also points out that for all those in exile, there is no place that can ever feel like a true home. Homelessness thus comes as a prevailing theme of exile, thus additionally highlighting an exile’s sad, desolate and dreadful future.

3. Loss of homeland

One of the very first things that exiles undeniably lose is their native country, their homeland. *Bait’s* narrator is plagued by a myriad of uncertainties and dilemmas regarding his life in Canada, that is his future homeland. Most of them mainly revolve around the quality of life he would experience in Canada, his homesickness and nostalgia, his ability to adapt to new surroundings and other issues. All of a sudden, he finds himself surrounded by strangers and everything around him feels unfamiliar, foreign and new. No matter how much Serbia did not really provide him with the life he desired and despite his voluntary decision to leave, Serbia, his Belgrade in particular, would forever remain the only home he ever had, the only true home. Canada, that is Alberta, never truly becomes a place he can call home.

Here, where the place never became my own, regardless of the cramped space of the house, I’m always running into something, looking for electrical switches in places where they’re not located, stooping down when I should be standing upright, pushing the door instead of pulling it, turning when I should be going straight ahead (Albahari, 2001; 40).

In Canada, he experiences displacement and uprootedness, since the emotions and the necessary connection one needs to call a certain place home are notably lacking in his case. His apartment in Alberta merely functions as a house, a physical setting where he now dwells, writes and works. Canada will forever retain the image of a cold, northern and distant place where he consistently feels lost, disoriented and even estranged. William Gass (1991; 106) in his essay titled *Exile* writes that it is alienation that characterizes the emotional and mental condition that constitutes the inner essence of exile. The protagonist's loss of home seems to permeate the walls of his apartment as he repeatedly experiences all the strangeness and unfamiliarity of a foreign place. Gordić Petković (2012; 100) further notes that the protagonist is not only unable to adapt to his new environment, but also incapable of recovering from the shock of losing his homeland.

Aleksić (2006; 68) specifies that both the narrator's mother's condition and his own "exiled conditions stem from the conflict between the lack of the sense of rootedness and a desire towards its acquisition". Serbia is a country of his birth and origin, but also of his historical, familial and cultural roots. "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define" (Weil, 1952; 40). His home is the only reminder of his entire childhood, any friends he might have had but also of his late parents and his mother in particular, with whom he shared a special connection. The fact that he has no remaining family left in Belgrade potentially makes his situation and his exile somewhat easier as he leaves no one behind and, moreover, there is no one to mourn his departure.

However, the war was not the only reason why Albahari's protagonist voluntarily chose to leave the country and move to Canada. At one point in the novel, he says that his life in Serbia, had he stayed, would have become absolutely unbearable or, in his own words, he would be "sucked in like a tiny crumb" (Albahari, 2001; 113). The protagonist sounds completely lost and more confused than ever. His own country had evidently been suffocating him. There seemed to be no place for him there, no life at all. He knew he had to go. He left thinking of a better life that surely awaited him in Canada, a country that appeared to be an idyllic haven for immigrants and exiles – a promised land for everyone. Leaving his country was his utmost priority.

If Serbia was indeed smothering him, Canada would thus rationally liberate him and grant him the freedom he desperately seeks. It would give him a new pair of lungs to breathe, a new opportunity to start a life. However, he, like all the exiles, was gravely mistaken. "Exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes" (Said,

2001; 141). Once in Canada, he faces his grasp of reality and comes to an understanding that “every departure is a slow dying” (Albahari, 2001; 83). Taking into consideration this statement alone, his prospects for obtaining a good life in Canada are virtually non-existent. Ribnikar (2005; 67) points out that in *Bait*, life is always closely associated with death.

The protagonist’s own words “so now I’m sitting here, in the North, watching my life diminish and sizzle like red-hot iron in the water” (Albahari, 2001; 21) metaphorically prove how hopeless and defeated he is. Not only is he displeased with his life in Canada, but also painfully and acutely aware of the distressing and terrible mental state he is in. He is profoundly sad and lonely, but also terrified as he watches his life shrink and fade before his eyes. The novel often uses these metaphorical images to show the readers the narrator’s inner state. In his book of essays, Albahari (2019) offers the readers an insight into the mind of an exile. He writes: “A conclusion is always the same: no matter what the arrival brought, a real life remained “far away there”. What we have here, at the best-case scenario, could be but a wretched imitation of life” (2019; 81).³ The painful feelings of exile, alienation and loneliness, mingled with fears and uncertainties about his future, make his life in Canada ever so cold and distant. In fact, what seems to plague the narrator the most is his inability to establish a stable and peaceful life in Canada. The life of an exile in the modern era, according to Said (2001; 146), equals a tragedy.

Further, what the protagonist, in his frantic and tormented mood, does not seem to understand, but the reader does, is that his life in Serbia in the past and his life in Canada now are not that much different at all. “All immigrants know that exile is much more attractive as a poetic image than it is as a lived experience. It looks better on paper than it does in life” (Boym, 2001; 256). In fact, one reaches a reasonable conclusion that there is no difference between these two countries and that his life in Serbia, where he would be *sucked in like a tiny crumb*, and his life in Canada which *diminishes and sizzles* are virtually the same. Both are equally tragic but each in its own way. What may come as a major disappointment for the protagonist is that the life he had in his former homeland, regardless of how distressing and difficult it really was, is better than the life he has now. The condition of exile, Said (2001; 146) notes, is never the one that is peaceful, stable, safe or where an exile is satisfied. The only real life *Bait’s* protagonist could ever hope to have remained *far away* there, in his Serbia, the only place he could call home.

³All quotations which originally are not in English have been translated by the author of this paper.

With all the repeated references to dying, shrinking and diminishing, the novel alludes that stability, peace and balance are terms which are unattainable for the narrator in exile. Depression and nostalgia, notes Albahari (2019; 56), constitute a life of any immigrant and, no matter what they do, they will always “step in the mud”.

Moreover, the protagonist finds himself in the gravest situation possible as neither Serbia nor Canada is his home now as he is “unable to imagine himself in either world” (Aleksić, 2006; 54). At the end of the novel, he was finally able to admit that he does not belong to “any place” and that “a life without place is a mere flitting about” (Albahari, 2001; 109). The loss of home then leaves him without shelter and renders him a homeless person which, on its own, introduces a new set of difficulties and challenges. The metaphor of *flitting about* not only captures the existential crisis he is going through, but also a lack of belonging to his new country and the identity crisis. The Canadian reality he faces becomes too severe and excruciatingly painful, leaving him utterly helpless as he watches his life “slowly leaking from him [me], drop by drop” (Ibid; 84). The loss of home deeply emphasizes the novel’s exploration of alienation and estrangement and is something the narrator is incapable of recovering from. The protagonist is left with the all-consuming void which affects all aspects of his life. It forms such a great rupture in his life that he becomes completely alienated from his homeland.

It is Gass (1991; 98) thus who asks the most fundamental question for any exile: “What exactly is the crime for which exile seems such an appropriate punishment?” The narrator’s *punishment* is to live a life of an exile in Canada, a life which, despite all his efforts, remains empty and hollow. Smith (1996; 49) writes that estrangement and exile, among other things, have “a fascination with death and absence, an insistence on the individual as a subject never in complete control of his speech”. The overwhelming feeling of absence and void the narrator is experiencing in Canada arises from the losses he is repeatedly enduring. The narrator is conscious of this void within him which poses a serious threat to his entire well-being as he goes through his new life like “an empty shell, like a conch which reaches the roar of a nonexistent sea” (Albahari, 2001; 16). However, it is Said (1993; 123) who specifies that when exiles leave their homeland, they cannot merely resume their life in the new surroundings and assimilate like any other citizen. The majority of exiles feel lost and unable to adapt. Smith (1996; 24) provides a more precise definition of the emotions and psychological turmoil exiles are undergoing. She states:

The exile's sense of space is so dislocated that he can no

longer affirm either the security of a psychic interior or the comforts of a normalising, 'transcendent' exterior (the father, the Law, God). There is no place that offers itself as home (Ibid; 24)

According to Smith (Ibid; 24), an exile's quest for home seems vain and futile. The narrator of *Bait* therefore can never hope to achieve it. All his efforts and struggling appear fruitless. Without the possibility of ever attaining home, his future in Canada looks bleak and empty. It comes as no surprise then, that exiles live their life with their head "forever turned backward" (Brodski, 1991; 104), towards the country they left and towards the only homeland they will ever know of.

4. Loss of Language, Identity and the Sense of Belonging

Loss of language is yet another feature that every immigrant and exile experiences. Upon his immigration to Canada, the protagonist is abruptly confronted with a shock of losing his mother-tongue. Despite his ability to fluently communicate in the language of the country he immigrated to, wherever he goes, he remains isolated and lonely. The reason for this isolation stems from the fact that English is not his mother tongue. His knowledge of and proficiency in English is quintessentially non-important, as long as it is not his native language, it holds no relevance for him. Hence, English only serves as a barrier between the Canadian citizens and himself. The fluency in English therefore, rather than helping him in assimilating into the new society, alienates him even further from it. Language, apart from being a means of communication, is also closely associated with one's culture, identity and a sense of belonging which is why they will be analysed together. The narrator is able to understand and acknowledge that in the harshest and most unyielding way – by experiencing it himself.

I'm speaking about language because exactly it, someone else's language, is constantly telling me I don't belong here, that I'm incapable of precisely expressing abstract concepts in it, condemned to the world of nouns and figures, newspaper banner headlines, and the labels in supermarkets (Albahari, 2001; 2).

Language, for the narrator of *Bait*, becomes a vehicle for establishing a sense of belonging to a certain place. Moreover, for him language equals identity. No matter what, his Serbian will always be his mother tongue, while English continues to be a foreign language that limits his ability to communicate or express himself effectively and in which he will always be "in desperate search for adequate expressions" (Gorup, 2005; 8). Language in *Bait* serves as a perpetual barrier which

constantly makes the protagonist feel like an outsider, preventing him from fully assimilating into Canadian society and ultimately resulting in a profound sense of estrangement and even alienation from everything that Canada embodies and symbolizes. Gass (2005; 97) notices that “to be exiled is not to be flung out of any door, but out of your own door; it is to lose your home where home suggests close emotional belonging and the gnarled roots of one's identity”. The exiled narrator, given that he is also exiled from his own language, as Mijatović and Đurić (2018; 87) add, must always, like all the other exiles, live “with the stigma of being an outsider” (Said, 2001; 144).

The loss of language, like the loss of his homeland, exerts a similar, even identical, impact on the narrator. He firmly states: “It’s as if I’ve diminished since no longer speaking my own language” (Albahari, 2001; 22). The loss of language and homeland cause the narrator to become smaller, to shrink in some way. Both losses diminish him greatly and have a profound negative impact on his life, his prospects, future, identity and sense of belonging. His struggle with language serves as a metaphorical reflection of his internal and external dilemmas. A foreign language repeatedly reminds him “that he does not belong” (Gorup, 2005; 8) there and that his adjustment to the new environment is almost impossible to achieve. Moreover, in a striking and tragic realization, the protagonist of *Bait* comes to understand that language, which once served as a vital means of communication, has now become a symbol of death. He declares:

One can die in a language just as one does in real life, I told him, and if I’ve already died, and I have died, then I don’t have the slightest wish to be a vampire or a ghost and to wander the expanses of that language like some forlorn creature from the tales of Edgar Allan Poe (Albahari, 2001; 177).

Not only does language equal identity for the narrator but it equals his metaphorical death as well. Deprived of his native language, the protagonist experiences a sense of void and of deep inner emptiness. In this light, his Serbian language stands as a symbol of life and a symbol of existence, while English represents the death of his identity, personality and of his selfhood. According to the protagonist, the act of forgetting his native language merely becomes “one of the quickest forms of death” (Ibid; 79). This painful and even fatal revelation, nevertheless, comes as no surprise for those who study the theme of exile as exile is, after all, “like death but without death’s ultimate mercy” (Said, 2001; 141). The committed “matricide” against Serbian, as Aleksić (2006; 60) frames it, represents a “forceful renunciation of his Serbian identity and his

personal/family and collective/national history – of everything that defined him in his past existence”. The *matricide* he commits also applies to the fact that he has actually willfully decided, once he arrives in Canada, never to use his Serbian with anyone (Ibid; 60). Vladiv Glover (2010; 9) confirms this and writes that "the narrator tries to renounce his mother tongue (which means his psyche) and transfer his identity into a new language – English “. While he discerns the voices of his countrymen who converse in Serbian, he entirely refrains from talking to them. Nonetheless, he desperately yearns to hear their voices and repeatedly listens to their conversations “so that he could feel normal” (Gorup, 2005; 8).

[...] and the whole time I was tormented by the fear that a return to my native language, reinforced by the fact that it was precisely my mother who was speaking it, would bring me back to where I no longer wanted to return, especially now that, thanks to someone else’s language, I was finally beginning to feel like someone else (Albahari, 2001; 106).

He firmly believes that by acquiring a foreign language in Canada and by forgetting his own, he will then be able to forge a new identity he needs for the survival. However, such a clear-cut division he imagined would happen is unattainable. What he certainly does not comprehend is that “it is the sound and the melody of the mother language that is the only valuable thing” (Miljković, 2016; 58) in his life. When it comes to establishing a new identity in a foreign country, an issue of Canadian identity immediately arises, a subject which, according to some authors, is a concept that is rather ambiguous. Albahari (2019; 128) addresses the issue of Canadian identity by saying that such an identity is never truly a firm one. He adds that Canadian identity might be something that exists outside of human beings, as if a Canadian citizen is “always in search of himself” (Ibid; 128). Finally, Canadian identity is nothing more than a hyphen which connects two or more terms (Ibid; 129). The concept of identity thus comes as a challenge for the narrator since he himself is constantly in search of himself. Albahari (Ibid; 127) further tackles the theme of identity by saying that an immigrant, such as *Bait’s* protagonist, possesses in fact several identities but also strongly emphasizes that the author himself may very likely die in Canada and never become its citizen. In the novel, the protagonist articulates it in a similar manner:

In general, it often happens that I feel myself existing simultaneously in many places, in various times, and that I continually repeat the same events (Albahari, 2001; 27).

The narrator's sense of identity is not only shattered but looks almost irretrievably lost. This harsh assertion further indicates that the narrator not only loses the identity he had in Serbia, but also fails in acquiring a new one too. "To be exiled is to be from here and from elsewhere, to be at the same time inside and outside, settled in the insecurity of a painful and uneasy situation" (Lahens, 1992; 736). His identity crisis emerges the moment he arrived in Canada and causes him to feel lost, wandering from place to place without any sort of direction. Aleksić (2006; 56) indicates that his Jewish identity is ambiguous, as it is not one he never identified with, but rather the identity his mother enforced upon him. This is the reason why, upon his arrival, he never mentions or discusses his Jewish roots or expresses any inclination to join a Jewish community or even attend their gatherings and religious places.

His statement that he will "always be a European" (Albahari, 2001; 62) merely corroborates the fact that he cannot establish a new identity by forgetting and dismissing everything that is Serbian – the language, the people and the country itself. Smith (1996; 22) adds that not only is the loss of identity something that an exile has to endure but that he becomes unable to distinguish between the outside world and "his own body which now appears repugnant to him". A complete lack of identity immediately presents a challenging dilemma and raises the fundamental question of what one might ultimately become without it. The answer can be found in the narrator's life who somehow manages to find a way to live, despite the fact that his life is completely void of any essence and involves feelings of sadness, despair and loneliness, given that exile is always seen "as a kind of orphanhood" (Said, 2001; 144). The *orphanhood* he experiences not only leaves him homeless, but also dispossesses him of almost everything that constitutes a human being.

5. Mother's Voice, Donald and Writing as a Cure for Exile

Although the narrator refuses to speak Serbian in Canada, he nevertheless repeatedly listens to the audiotapes of his mother, which, ironically, are recorded in Serbian. The tapes represent the life of his mother and it could be said that it is through them, through the voice of his dead mother, that he manages to survive and live. Her voice, which he listens to time and time again, constantly reminds him of his home, comfort, love and security he does not have in Canada, and as such comes to represent precisely those things he lacks – his homeland, his language, identity and a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, readers come to a conclusion that "the drama of the

narrator's exile is the drama of his psychological separation from the mother" (Miljković, 2016; 57). The mother therefore, that is his home, language and identity, not also symbolizes his exile, but also all of his struggles, traumas and hardships he suffers from in Calgary. Miljković (Ibid; 58) further adds that it is the mother's voice that is needed and essential for his exiled life in Canada. The tapes are thus, undoubtedly, one of the most valuable possessions he has. It is through them, Mijatović and Đurić (2018; 95) conclude, that he engages in the imaginary dialogue with his mother that he desperately needs.

The protagonist appears to be unable to stop listening to the tapes of his mother which also symbolizes his strong attachment to her, given that she embodies the protagonist's entire life. Moreover, "his relationship with the mother reveals that he is also trying to cut the psychological, national and cultural ties that hold him connected to his language and his country" (Miljković, 2016; 50). As the novel finishes, readers see that he cannot cut those ties, which serve as an obstacle to the protagonist's survival and adjustment. His mother's voice, along with her memory, has a vital role in his life. Vladiv Glover (2010; 10) confirms this by saying that the connection with his mother is subconscious and complete and that she symbolizes his entire personal and national identity. Although Lopičić and Kostić (2014; 232) write that "the mother embodying the motherland and speaking the mother tongue now stands in the way of her son moving on in a new cultural environment and experiencing an identity shift", her presence through the tapes is of the utmost importance. Her voice not only reminds him of her but also of his Serbian language, his people and his hometown, Zemun. Her voice, in fact, is "the narrator's subconsciousness" (Vladiv Glover, 2010; 4). Having the tapes at his disposal, the narrator can decide whether he wants to live his life in Canada in the present or dwell in the past. By clicking the on and off button on the tape recorder, he is the one who is in control and can limit the mother's presence in his life. "The Mother's voice is passive, non-discursive, almost literally 'frozen' as a symbol (a symbol of the subconscious, etc.), suspended in time and serves merely as a trigger for the 'loud' reflections of the son-narrator" (Vladiv Glover, 2010; 12).

Donald, his only Canadian friend, has the role of an intermediary, helping him during the period of adaptation he is going through it in Canada. He represents the protagonist's need to have company, to belong somewhere all with the purpose of not being alone. Despite all the differences between them, Donald offers him a temporary refuge from exile. The protagonist claims: "In short, Donald was, and is, my gardener. If not for him, I would have wilted long ago" (Albahari, 2001; 63). Donald therefore, along with the mother's voice, functions as a cure

for the protagonist's state of exile. Mijatović and Đurić (2018; 87) emphasize that Donald, on the one hand, belongs to the world of the semi-present whereas his mother, on the other, comes from the semi-past but with a constant reappearance in the narrator's present through the audiotapes. Donald also functions as a foil to the narrator, as Melnyk and Coates (2017; 100) point out, although not purposefully, in adapting to his new cultural surrounding. In the entangled world where the protagonist faces homeland and language related issues, where he repeatedly experiences some sort of spiritual death, Donald offers a glimmer of hope. Without him, he would simply wither away and become a ghost-like image of a man who can make no sense of his life. Donald, in fact, represents a stark contrast to the protagonist. Whereas he, as a Canadian, easily and naturally adjusts to the Canadian society and life, the protagonist struggles with exile, loss and displacement wherever he goes. Donald thus, having somewhat stable and secure life and possessing moral strength, serves to highlight the narrator's moral weakness, his degeneration and vulnerability, but also his dependence on a man with whom he has almost nothing in common.

Apart from the mother and Donald, writing too represents a unique cure for the protagonist. Many literary critics have discussed this particular segment of exile which, according to them, seems to be a singular experience for all exiles. Boym (2001; 252) writes that "perhaps the only cure or temporary relief of the symptoms of homesickness can be found in aesthetic therapy as proposed by some exiled artists and writers". The narrator is, throughout the novel, engaged in writing a novel about his life in Canada, the activity which makes him think less about the quality of the life he leads. Said (2001; 144) expands on this topic as well and claims that "much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals". *Bait's* narrator is not an exception to this. Writing a novel is his compensation for a myriad of losses and his way of dealing with exile. The act of writing is his own defense mechanism established as a cure for his exile and it does help him with that, at least for a certain period of time. His writing indeed is a cure for everything as it "can make up for every loss and somehow bring back the mother, the country and the language, and eventually fill the empty shell" (Milutinović, 2005; 15). The language he uses for the book he writes is, not surprisingly, Serbian. The novel thus constantly brings him back to the past and serves as a proof that he cannot leave it behind him. Therefore, the writing process is an indispensable part of his life, "a means of survival" (Gorup, 2005; 13) which makes him oblivious of all

the obstacles and difficulties he has to cope with every day. It is an essential, lifesaving activity that occupies his mind and heals his heart, now already broken by the losses he can never atone for.

6. Conclusion

The ending of the novel reveals that the protagonist cannot simply forget his old country and continue with his life. The scenario he would like to have happened – “Exit Mother and enter Donald; that’s how it would be written in a play if all this were a stage performance and not a real life” (Albahari, 2001; 108) – can never take place. The process of adaptation is far more complex than that. Boym’s words that exile *looks better on paper than it does in life* now appear to be truer than ever. The mother figure emerges as a metaphor for all of his roots, embodying his identity, language and country. She stands as a constant reminder of the place he left, the country he loved, the language he could not forget and the people he could claim as his own. The loss of his mother therefore is felt not merely physically, but also symbolically, because her loss leaves the void in the narrator’s life.

Apart from the mother figure, writing too, in the narrator’s own case, efficiently served its purpose in the novel. It has helped him with his daily struggles, easing his traumas and most importantly, helping him forget, at least temporarily, about the dreadful Canadian present that surrounds him. Writing offers him an escape into a world of his own. In writing, he is the one who has control over the narrative, over the beginning and ending. It becomes a place of refuge for him where the losses of his mother, his homeland, his identity and language are felt less acutely.

The act of writing thus, metaphorically, becomes some sort of shelter where the narrator can protect himself from the struggles of exile. Said (1993; 120) defines it in the following words: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live”. Writing, in fact, is the true definition of homeland for the narrator. Albahari’s narrator, while talking about the book he wrote and sent to Donald to read, added: “I have relinquished an entire possible life into his hands” (Albahari, 2001; 108). His book therefore has now become not only his homeland but everything to him.

It can be therefore concluded that literature, in *Bait*, has the power to heal the difficult ordeals of exile and somehow lessen the burden which seems to threaten an exile’s entire existence. Literature offers a new world, a different perspective where writers can have the freedom not only to express themselves however they want but also to save themselves from whichever they are suffering from. This is particularly important for the writers in exile as they can find their refuge in written

words which carry such a heavy burden. However, one must never forget that in exile “the hurt heart heals, but the healed heart still hurts” (Gass, 1991; 98).

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ЕГИЛ И ГУБИТАК У РОМАНУ ДАВИДА АЛБАХАРИЈА МАМАЦ

Главни лик романа Давида Алабахарија *Мамац* напушта Србију и бежи у Канаду где покушава да изнова започне свој живот. Приповедач је сам али и усамљен, тужан, забринут и потпуно отуђен од своје нове околине, језика, културе и људи. Рад ће примарно бити заснован на дефиницијама и значењима егила које су дали Едвард Саид (2001) и Светлана Бојм (2001), а у којима обоје препознају губитак као његов фундаментални део. Овај рад има за циљ да покаже комплексност губитка у оквиру егила, као и начине на које се он може превазићи. Живот приповедача у роману испуњен је различитим губицима – губитак своје земље, језика, својих људи, идентитета и осећаја припадности. Упркос свим обећањима доброг живота које Канада наизглед нуди приповедачу романа, Албахари га представља као човека који пати и који се очајнички труди да се прилагоди свему ономе што Канада представља. Рад ће се фокусирати на то како приповедач превазилази своју отуђеност и покушава да оформи свој нови идентитет у новој земљи док се бори са тугом и отуђеношћу својевољног егила.

Кључне речи: Албахари, егил, губитак, земља, језик, отуђеност, идентитет.