THE BALKANS REVIEW OF BOOKS

September | 2026

Pilot Issue

Issue 01



Coming Home

The Summers We Carry

The Balkans Remembered through Sea, Family, Migration & Return

THERE ARE PLACES WE NEVER REALLY LEAVE.

WE CARRY THEM IN OUR MEMORIES, STORIES, LANGUAGES AND SONGS.

ISSUE 01 IS AN INVITATION TO REMEMBER , BECAUSE MEMORY, TOO, IS A WAY OF COMING HOME.

THE BALKANS REVIEW OF BOOKS

MEET OUR TRAVELING CREW

A SMALL CREW, A MANY-SIDED BALKANS

Editor-in-Chief
Dionysia



Gjirokastër, Albania · Greece
Role: Founder & Editor of The Balkans Review of Books
Reads: Balkan literature, women's writing, migration stories, memory, belonging, family, and books that refuse to stay inside one border.

I am interested in the Balkans we inherit through our families, the Balkans we leave behind, the Balkans we return to, and the Balkans we carry with us when we live somewhere else.

This project is deeply personal.

I was born in Gjirokastër, a stone city in Albania, and my life has been shaped between Albanian and Greek cultures. Growing up between languages taught me that identity is rarely simple, and that belonging can exist in more than one place.

The journal is also connected to a family story. This project continues a conversation that began before me: a belief that stories deserve to be remembered and shared.

Different places. Different memories. One reading journey.

THE BALKANS REVIEW OF BOOKS

MEET OUR TRAVELING CREW

A SMALL CREW, A MANY-SIDED BALKANS

Co-Editor
Eleni

Patras, Greece

Role: Co-Editor of The Balkans Review of Books
Reads: Contemporary literature, women's writing, stories about identity, memory, migration, language, family and the complicated ways we understand where we belong.



I have always been interested in people and the stories they carry with them. The books I remember most are usually the ones that make me recognise something from my own life, see someone else's differently, or think about a place long after I have finished reading.

My background in education and language has made me especially curious about the way stories move between people and cultures. I love the small things that can hold an entire memory: a word in another language, a family story you have heard a hundred times, a song, a photograph, a familiar meal or a place you have not seen in years.

That is what makes The Balkans Review of Books personal to me. I want it to be a space where we can talk about books without stopping at books. Where a novel can lead us to a film, a memory, a conversation, a family story or a question about ourselves.

For me, the Balkans are full of those connections. Different countries and languages, but so many moments that somehow feel familiar.

Some stories we read. Others we recognise.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to a Region of Many Voices

The Balkans are a region of many languages, histories and memories. They are places of crossings and contradictions, of ancient cities and new beginnings, of stories carried across borders and generations.

The Balkans Review of Books was created to celebrate the literature, poetry and cultural voices that reveal the complexity of this region beyond familiar narratives. Our goal is to create a space for writers, translators and readers who explore questions of identity, memory, belonging, freedom, migration and the meaning of home.

The journal is a tribute to all voices that have been silenced, overlooked or separated by borders. Through books, poetry, essays, films and cultural reflections, we seek to create connections across the Balkans and beyond.

Because literature allows us to return to places we have left, discover places we have never known and find pieces of ourselves in the stories of others.

Welcome to a region of many voices.
Welcome to the Balkans.

The Balkans Review of Books began from a simple belief:
We can read a region differently when we read the stories it tells about itself.

Different places.
Different memories.
One reading journey.



By Dionysia & Eleni

Opening Essay

WHY "COMING HOME"?

Before we belong to a country, we belong to a street.

Childhood is our first geography, long before maps define us.

It is the sound of familiar voices, the shape of a neighbourhoud, the road we walked every day, the landscape we first learned to love. Perhaps that is why returning home is never only about returning to a place.

It is about searching for the person we once were.

But home also lives in smaller things. In the words we grew up hearing. In a family story told so many times that it somehow becomes part of our own memory. In a song, a meal, a book, or a familiar voice that can take us somewhere before we even realise we have returned.

The first issue of The Balkans Review of Books begins with Coming Home because the Balkans are a region shaped by movement: departures and returns, borders and crossings, memories carried across generations.

And perhaps this is why stories matter so much here. They allow us to recognise pieces of ourselves in lives that may, at first, seem different from our own.

For many, home is not a single point on a map.

It is a language.
A family story.
A landscape remembered.
A table.
A voice.
A road taken many times.
A story that somehow feels familiar, even when it is not ours.
Or a place that continues to live within us even after we leave.

Through books, poetry, films and cultural reflections, this issue explores the many meanings of home: the homes we inherit, the homes we lose, the homes we rebuild and the homes we create.

We are interested not only in where people come from, but in what they carry with them. The memories, words and stories that survive distance, change and time.

Because sometimes coming home does not mean finding the place we left.

Sometimes it means discovering what that place left inside us.

And sometimes, we find our way back through someone else's story.



Dionysia - Eleni

BOOKS WE CARRY HOME

Across the Balkans, Through Books

Books can take us home in ways that maps cannot.

In the first issue of The Balkans Review of Books, we begin with stories that move through streets, villages, borders, families and generations. Some of these books return to places shaped by history, others follow people who leave, cross borders or find themselves caught between different worlds.

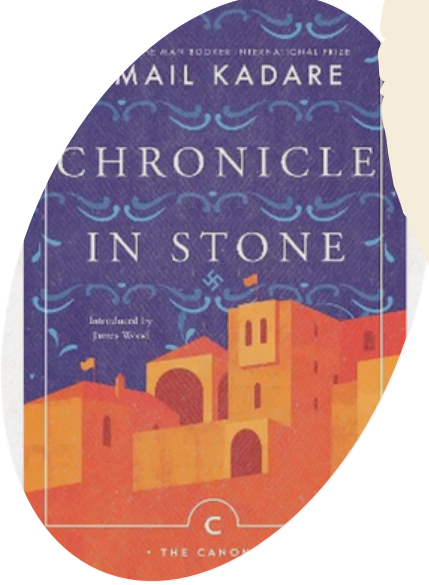
From Albania to Bosnia, Greece and Turkey, these stories offer ***different ways of understanding home, belonging and memory***.

They remind us that the Balkans are not one story.

They are many stories, sometimes connected, sometimes contradictory, but always carried by the people who remember them.

Across the Balkans, one book at a time.





AUTHOR: ISMAIL KADARE
COUNTRY: ALBANIA
ORIGINAL PUBLICATION: 1971

Kadare, Ismail. Chronicle in Stone. Canongate Books, 2018. First published in Albanian in 1971.

Chronicle in Stone - Ismail Kadare

The city itself becomes a living witness to history.

Stone streets. Childhood. Neighbors. Growing up inside history. A novel set in a stone city where childhood unfolds against the backdrop of war. Through family stories, neighborhood gossip and the imagination of a young narrator Kadare explores how memory shapes both personal identity and our sense of home.

Short Synopsis : Set in a stone city in Albania during the Second World War, Chronicle in Stone follows a young boy as successive occupying forces pass through his hometown. While adults struggle to make sense of political upheaval and war, the child observes the changing world with curiosity, imagination and wonder.

Kadare's novel explores the intimate relationship between childhood, memory, place and home, showing how the stories of a city can become inseparable from the memories of those who grow up within it.

Why We Chose This Book

Every issue begins with a question. This summer, we asked: *What does it mean to come home?*

Chronicle in Stone offers an answer that feels deeply Balkan and profoundly universal. In Kadare's novel, ***home*** is preserved in memory, in stories, streets, childhood landscapes and the voices we carry long after we leave.

As war transforms the town and history reshapes everyday life, the narrator builds a sense of belonging through observation, imagination and remembrance. The novel reminds us that even when places change, ***memory can become a form of home***.

For this issue, Coming Home, Kadare opens an essential conversation: *perhaps we do not return to the places we once knew. Instead, we return to the stories that continue to live within us.*

THEMES

Memory

In Chronicle in Stone, memory is a living force that shapes how we understand the past. Through a child's imagination, reality and legend often blend together raising the question of whether memory preserves what happened or recreates home through storytelling.

Childhood

The places of childhood become landscapes we carry into adulthood. Through streets, houses, voices and everyday rituals, Kadare shows how childhood shapes our understanding of home, even as war enters the world around us.

Home & Belonging

Home is more than a house or a city. It is a sense of belonging created through relationships, memories and everyday life. The book asks whether home is a place we can return to or something we to carry within ourselves.

History

History is not abstract in Chronicle in Stone. It enters ordinary life: kitchens, streets, families and conversations. Kadare shows how ordinary lives absorb its consequences, raising the question of how much of history becomes part of our personal memories?

LITERARY LENS

The City Through a Child's Eyes

Some novels have unforgettable characters. Chronicle in Stone has a city and a child.

Kadare tells history through the eyes of a young boy. War is not explained through dates or political events, it is experienced through changing faces, whispered rumours, family conversations and ordinary moments that suddenly become uncertain.

Through the child's perspective, Gjirokastër feels almost alive. Its stone houses, streets and alleys become witnesses to history, while folklore, dreams and imagination blend with reality. The child may not understand everything that is happening, but his observations reveal how deeply history enters everyday life.

For an issue devoted to Coming Home, this perspective feels especially meaningful. We rarely return to our childhood homes as the people we have become. Instead, we return through the child we once were.

Perhaps ***the truest map of home is*** not ***drawn*** by geography, but ***by childhood***.

Why It Still Matters Today

More than fifty years after its publication, Chronicle in Stone continues to speak to a world shaped by displacement, conflict, and the search for belonging. Across Europe and beyond, millions of people live between countries, languages, and memories, carrying a version of home that no longer exists in quite the same way. Kadare reminds us that home is never only a place, it is something we preserve through stories, relationships and remembrance.

The book also challenges us to consider how children experience history. While adults debate politics and borders, children absorb change through everyday life: a different atmosphere in the streets, unfamiliar faces, silences at the dinner table. In an age when war, migration and uncertainty continue to shape childhoods around the world, this perspective feels especially urgent.

For readers today, Chronicle in Stone asks:
What happens when the places we love change?
How do we remember a home we cannot fully return to?
Can memory itself become a place of belonging?

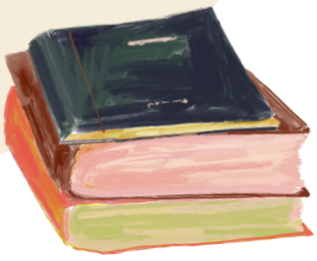
These are not only questions about the past, they are questions many of us continue to face today.

SIT WITH THIS

Before you close the book, pause for a moment.

- What does it mean to come home when the place you remember has changed?
- Can memory become a form of home?
- What remains of us in the places we leave behind?
- What happens when the places we love change beyond recognition?
- Which childhood sound, street, house or landscape still lives within you?
- Do we return to places or to the stories that continue to live within us?
- When you think of home, do you remember a place or a feeling?
- Can memory itself become a place of belonging?

Perhaps coming home is not about finding the same streets again, but discovering that they have never completely left us.





AUTHOR: LEA YPI
COUNTRY: ALBANIA
ORIGINAL PUBLICATION: 2021

Ypi, Lea. Free: Coming of Age at the End of History. Penguin Books, 2022.

Free - Lea Ypi

As children, we rarely question the world we inherit. Only later do we discover that freedom is more complicated than certainty, and that history can reshape even our most intimate memories.

Across the Balkans, family photographs, school lessons, borders and dinner-table conversations reveal how public history enters private life.

Short Synopsis : Set in Albania during the final years of communism and its turbulent transition, Free follows Lea Ypi from childhood into adolescence as her world changes. As political certainties collapse and family secrets emerge, she discovers that freedom, truth and belonging are more complicated than she imagined.

Through the eyes of a child growing up inside a country undergoing profound transformation, Ypi offers an intimate portrait of family, memory and a changing Albania.

Why We Chose This Book

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, Free reminds us that home is shaped not only by geography, but also by memory, family and the stories we inherit.

Lea Ypi's memoir explores what it means to grow up believing in one version of the world before discovering another. As Albania undergoes profound political change, ideas of home, identity and freedom change with it.

Today, in a Europe still shaped by migration and questions of belonging, Free speaks with remarkable urgency. It reminds us that personal lives are often inseparable from political history, and that childhood memories can carry meanings we only understand much later.

We chose Free because it asks a question that resonates far beyond Albania: *Is coming home about returning to a place or understanding the history that shaped us?*

THEMES

Home

In *Free*, home is both intimate and political. It is a family apartment, a city, and a country in transition. As Albania changes, the meaning of home changes too, reminding us that belonging is often shaped by history as much as by affection.

Childhood

The memoir captures the clarity and confusion of childhood with extraordinary sensitivity. Through a child's perspective, readers experience historical change not through political speeches but through everyday conversations, friendships, and family life.

Freedom and Identity

As Lea Ypi grows older, freedom becomes less straightforward than she once imagined. The memoir asks whether freedom is simply the absence of oppression or something we continually negotiate through responsibility, truth, and self-understanding.

Memory

Looking back as an adult, Ypi reflects on the distance between childhood perceptions and historical reality. Memory becomes both an act of remembering and an act of reinterpreting the past with greater understanding.



LITERARY LENS

The Child's Perspective

One of the memoir's greatest strengths is its unwavering commitment to the child's point of view. The reader understands only what the young Lea understands, making moments of misunderstanding, curiosity, and discovery deeply authentic. Political transformation is filtered through everyday life: school lessons, family conversations, friendships, and ordinary routines. Rather than explaining history first, the memoir allows readers to experience the gradual awakening of a child's understanding. In doing so, it reminds us that history often enters our lives quietly, long before we learn the language to describe it.

WHY IT STILL MATTERS TODAY

Free remains profoundly relevant because questions about freedom, democracy, truth, and belonging continue to shape Europe and the wider world. Across generations, people still inherit competing versions of history, navigate political change, and search for a place where they can belong without abandoning who they are.

For readers in 2026, the memoir also speaks to children of migrants, families living between cultures, and societies learning to confront difficult pasts. It reminds us that freedom is not a destination reached once and for all, but an ongoing practice of questioning, listening, and understanding.

REFLECTION

Free reminds us that growing up is not only about getting older, it is about learning to see the stories we inherited in a new light. Perhaps coming home is not about returning to the certainties of childhood, but about finding the courage to question them with compassion and understanding.

SIT WITH THIS

Before you close the book, pause for a moment.

- When did you first realise that the world was more complicated than you had been told?
- What does freedom mean to you today that it did not mean when you were a child?
- Can childhood memories ever be separated from the history surrounding them?
- Can memory become a home when home itself has changed?
- Which family story changed meaning as you grew older?
- Who are we without the stories of the place that raised us?
- What remains of us in the places we leave behind?

Perhaps coming home is not only about returning to a place, but about understanding the history that shaped us.





AUTHOR: IVO ANDRIĆ
COUNTRY: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
ORIGINAL PUBLICATION: 1945

Andrić, Ivo. The Bridge over the Drina. Translated by Lovett F. Edwards. Harvill Press, 1994. First published in 1945.

The Bridge on the Drina - Ivo Andrić

The Places That Remember

Some places simply exist. Others remember.

A bridge can witness generations passing: children on their way to school, lovers, merchants, soldiers, refugees, and people returning after years away. It remains while the world around it changes.

In The Bridge on the Drina, the bridge becomes more than a setting. It becomes a keeper of memory, a place where private lives and public history meet.

Short Synopsis : Set in the Bosnian town of Višegrad, The Bridge on the Drina follows the lives of the people who live around the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge across several centuries. As empires change, borders shift and generations come and go, the bridge remains a silent witness to everyday life, conflict, love, loss and displacement.

Andrić explores the relationship between place, memory, history and belonging, showing how a single landscape can hold the stories of many generations.

Why We Chose This Book

Every issue begins with a question. This summer, we asked: *What does it mean to come home?*

The Bridge on the Drina offers a different answer. Here, home is not simply a house or a birthplace. It is a place shaped by generations, a landscape that remembers those who passed through it.

The bridge survives while people leave, return, disappear and are replaced. It becomes a meeting point between memory and history, belonging and displacement.

For this issue, Coming Home, Andrić reminds us that *sometimes the places we leave behind continue to hold our stories long after we are gone.*

THEMES

Memory

Memory in this novel belongs to a community rather than an individual. Every generation leaves traces behind, adding another layer to the identity of the place.

Belonging

The people of Višegrad differ in religion, language, and background, yet they are connected by the same landscape and the same bridge. Home emerges as something shared, even when identities are diverse.

Time

One of the novel's most striking ideas is the contrast between human life and historical time. Individual stories are brief; places endure. The bridge reminds us that history is built from countless ordinary lives.

Change

Empires rise and fall, borders shift, and societies transform. Yet people continue to search for familiarity, connection, and continuity. Home survives not because nothing changes, but because memory gives meaning to change.

LITERARY LENS

The Bridge as Witness

Some novels have unforgettable characters. The Bridge on the Drina has a bridge and generations of people who pass through its story.

Andrić tells history through the lives of ordinary people. The bridge witnesses love, celebration, violence, loss and departure, while quietly connecting generations, cultures and changing worlds.

History does not arrive through dates and political events alone. It enters homes, conversations, customs and everyday life. Empires change, borders move and people come and go, but the bridge remains.

For an issue devoted to Coming Home, this perspective feels especially meaningful. The people who leave may change, disappear or return, but the places they passed through ***continue to hold traces of their lives***.

Perhaps ***home is*** not only the place we remember, but also ***the place that remembers us***.

Why It Still Matters Today

Across the Balkans and beyond, many people have experienced migration, changing borders or lives between countries and cultures. Questions of belonging, memory and home remain deeply relevant.

The Bridge on the Drina reminds us that places can connect communities across generations, even as borders, identities and political systems change. The bridge becomes a reminder of what remains when everything else is transformed.

For readers today, the novel asks: ***What happens to the places we inherit when the world around them changes? Who remembers when the people who lived there are gone?***

Perhaps ***home*** is never only personal. It ***can*** also be ***collective***, layered and carried forward through ***shared memory***.

SIT WITH THIS

Before you close the book, pause for a moment.

- What remains of us in the places we leave behind?
- Is there a place that has quietly witnessed generations of your family or community?
- Can a place become a form of memory?
- What happens when the places we love change beyond recognition?
- Which street, landscape or familiar place still feels like home?
- Do we return to places or to the stories that continue to live within us?

Perhaps home is not only the place where our story begins, but the place where countless stories meet.

And perhaps, like a bridge, it allows us to cross between past and present, memory and belonging, ourselves and others.





AUTHOR: MARGARITA LIBERAKI
COUNTRY: GREECE
ORIGINAL PUBLICATION: 1946

Liberaki, Margarita. Three Summers. Penguin Books, 2021. First published in Greek in 1946.

Three Summers - Margarita Liberaki

The Summers We Carry

Some places stay with us long after we leave them, not because they were extraordinary, but because they witnessed who we once were.

A garden. A veranda. A familiar voice. A summer afternoon that seemed endless.

In Three Summers, home is not simply a place. It is a season of life, a collection of ordinary moments that become meaningful when we look back.

Perhaps this is why coming home can be so complicated. The house may still be there, but the people, the seasons and the person we once were may not.

Short Synopsis : Published in 1946, Three Summers follows three sisters across three consecutive summers in post-war Greece.

Through family life, friendships, first loves and the gradual movement from adolescence towards adulthood, Margarita Liberaki captures the quiet transformations of everyday life.

Why We Chose This Book

Every issue begins with a question. This summer, we asked: What does it mean to come home?

Three Summers offers a quieter answer.

Here, home is found in family, childhood, seasons and ordinary moments, the things we often fail to notice until they become memories.

The novel reminds us that we do not only remember places. We remember how it felt to belong to them.

For Coming Home, Liberaki opens another essential conversation: *Perhaps we do not return to the summers we remember. Perhaps we carry them with us instead.*

THEMES

Memory

The summers become memories almost as soon as they pass. Liberaki shows how ordinary moments, voices, gardens, conversations and long afternoons can become the memories we carry longest.

Family

Home is created through relationships. The sisters' lives reveal affection, conflict, intimacy and the complicated bonds that shape our earliest sense of belonging.

Growing Up

As the sisters change, the world around them begins to feel different. Familiar places remain, but their meaning shifts. Sometimes home changes because we do.

Time

Three summers become a quiet measure of growing up. Each season brings small changes, reminding us that life rarely changes all at once, we often understand it only when we look back.

LITERARY LENS

The Summer as Memory

One of Three Summers' greatest strengths is its attention to atmosphere. Gardens, sunlight, weather, conversations and domestic routines become as meaningful as the events themselves.

Liberaki asks us to slow down and notice the moments that seem ordinary while we are living them, but become precious once they are gone. Summer becomes more than a season. It becomes a space between childhood and adulthood, familiarity and change, where memories are formed almost without us noticing.

The sisters grow older, but the summers remain behind them like places they can revisit through memory.

Some seasons become places.

WHY IT STILL MATTERS TODAY

In a world shaped by migration, mobility and constant change, many people grow up far from where they began or return to places that no longer feel quite the same.
Three Summers reminds us that home can survive through shared meals, familiar voices, landscapes, laughter and the rhythm of seasons.

For readers today, it asks:
What happens when we return to a place but cannot return to the people or the person we once were?

Perhaps belonging is not something we find again, but something we recognise in the memories we have carried all along.

REFLECTION

We often imagine that coming home means returning to something familiar.

But perhaps coming home is not about finding the past unchanged. It is about carrying the memories, relationships and moments that shaped us into the places we become.

Perhaps home is less a destination than a story we continue to carry with us.

SIT WITH THIS

Before you close the book, pause for a moment.

- Which summer from your childhood still lives within you?
- What ordinary moment became meaningful only after it was gone?
- Is there a place that feels like home because of the people you remember there?
- Have you ever returned somewhere and realised that you were the one who had changed?
- What season, landscape or sound immediately takes you back?

Perhaps home is not a place we can return to unchanged, but a collection of moments we continue to carry.



AUTHOR: LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES
COUNTRY: UNITED KINGDOM
ORIGINAL PUBLICATION: 2004



de Bernières, Louis. Birds Without Wings. Vintage, 2008. First published in 2004.

Birds Without Wings - Louis de Bernières (UK)

When Neighbours Become Strangers

What happens when the place you call home suddenly belongs to another country?

In Birds Without Wings, a coastal Anatolian village becomes a meeting place for different languages, religions and communities. Neighbours share streets, traditions, friendships and everyday life until history begins to pull them apart.

The novel reminds us that home can be shared by people who do not share the same identity, and that borders can transform neighbours into strangers without changing the places they once called home.

Short Synopsis

Set in an Anatolian village during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the upheavals that followed, Birds Without Wings follows the lives of villagers whose different communities have long lived alongside one another.

As war, nationalism and political change reshape the region, friendships and relationships are tested. The eventual population exchange between Greece and Turkey turns a shared landscape into a place of departure and loss.

Through these intertwined lives, de Bernières explores coexistence, migration, memory and the loss of home.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS BOOK

Every issue begins with a question. This summer, we asked: What does it mean to come home?

Birds Without Wings asks what happens when home is still there, but you are no longer allowed to remain in it.

The novel brings another dimension to Coming Home: the experience of people who leave not because they choose to, but because history leaves them no choice.

For communities across the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean, migration has often meant carrying a home that can no longer be physically reached.

Sometimes the hardest home to return to is the one that still exists without you.

LITERARY LENS

When Neighbours Become Strangers

De Bernières builds his story through many voices and interconnected lives, allowing a community to emerge before showing how easily it can be fractured.

The village is not simply a setting. It is a shared home, built through food, language, religion, friendship, work and everyday encounters.

Then history intervenes.

War and nationalism transform relationships that once seemed ordinary. The population exchange does not simply move people across a border; it breaks the continuity of a place.

The novel asks us to consider what happens when people who once belonged to the same landscape are suddenly divided into “us” and “them.”

HISTORY BEHIND THE STORY

The novel draws on the upheavals surrounding the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Greco-Turkish War and the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

Hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christians from Turkey and Muslims from Greece were displaced and resettled according to religion rather than simply where they had lived.

For many, migration meant leaving behind homes, neighbours, cemeteries, languages, traditions and landscapes that had shaped generations.

WHY IT STILL MATTERS TODAY

The experience at the heart of Birds Without Wings remains familiar across the Balkans and beyond.

People continue to leave homes because of war, borders, political change or circumstances beyond their control. And when they leave, they do not simply carry belongings. They carry languages, recipes, songs, rituals, names and memories.

The novel reminds us that migration is not only a movement between countries. It can also be the loss of an entire world.

What happens when the people who shared your home become strangers and when the place you remember can no longer be reached in the same way?

SIT WITH THIS

Before you close the book, pause for a moment.

- Could you leave your home forever with one suitcase?
- Which traditions would you carry with you?
- What would you miss that could never be packed?
- What would you refuse to leave behind?
- Can a place remain home even after you can no longer return to it?
- Sometimes we understand our own home only after seeing it through someone else's eyes. Has that ever happened to you?

Perhaps home is not only the place we come from, but everything we carry when we are forced to leave.



POETRY



Across the Aegean and Adriatic



The Balkans Beyond Borders: The Sea as Memory

The Balkans Beyond Borders
The Sea as Memory

The Balkans are surrounded by seas that carry different names - the Aegean, the Adriatic, the Ionian, the Black Sea - but in literature they often become one shared landscape of memory.

For some writers, the sea is childhood. For others, it is departure, longing, exile, or the impossible hope of return. It separates countries while connecting cultures, carrying the same winds across different languages.

In this issue, we travel across the Balkans through poems that ask a simple question: ***What does the sea remember?***

From Greece to Croatia, from Albania to Serbia, these voices remind us that water does not recognise borders. The same waves that leave one shore arrive at another, carrying stories, histories and memories that belong to us all.

A GEOGRAPHICAL ARC

SEFERIS LOOKS EAST ACROSS THE AEGEAN.
KAŠTELAN AND NAZOR OVER THE ADRIATIC.
AHMETI ACROSS THE IONIAN.
TOGETHER, THEY CREATE A GEOGRAPHICAL ARC AROUND THE BALKANS, DIFFERENT SHORES CONNECTED BY THE SAME SEA.
NOT A BORDER, BUT A SHARED SPACE OF MEMORY, MOVEMENT AND BELONGING.

Jure Kaštelan - Croatia

Why this poem belongs in this issue

Kaštelan's Adriatic is both intimate and immense. The sea becomes a companion to memory, carrying the rhythms of everyday life alongside the weight of history. His poetry reminds us that home often lives in the images we continue to carry.

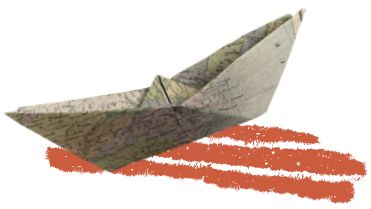
As you read, ask yourself ***What image from your childhood has never left you?***

Vladimir Nazor - Croatia

Why this poem belongs in this issue?

Nazor's sea is rooted in place, yet it speaks beyond borders. His poetry celebrates the enduring relationship between people and landscape, suggesting that nature remembers generations long after they have gone.

As you read, ask yourself: ***Can a place become part of your identity without you noticing?***



George Seferis - Greece

Why this poem belongs in this issue?

Seferis writes about the sea not as scenery but as a place where memory settles. His landscapes are filled with absence, silence and the feeling that home is always just beyond the horizon.

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, his poetry reminds us that returning is often an emotional journey before it is a geographical one.

As you read, ask yourself: ***Can a landscape remember us after we have left it?***

Mimoza Ahmeti - Albania

Why this poem belongs in this issue?

Ahmeti approaches memory with a contemporary , intimate and deeply personal voice. The sea becomes a space where identity, longing and belonging are constantly renegotiated.

Her work reminds us that coming home is sometimes less about returning to a place and more about understanding who we have become.

As you read, ask yourself: ***Who are you when no place feels entirely yours?***

FILM CLUB

Coming Home on Screen



The Balkans are more than a place on a map. They are landscapes of memory, departures, borders and returns.

The films in this issue ask a simple but enduring question: ***What does it mean to come home?***

01 — Landscape in the Mist
Theo Angelopoulos · 1988 · Greece
02 — Eternity and a Day
Theo Angelopoulos · 1998 · Greece
03 — **Murina**
Antoneta Alamat Kusijanović · 2021 · Croatia
04 — Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams
Jasmila Žbanić · 2006 · Bosnia and Herzegovina
05 — The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner
Stephan Komandarev · 2008 · Bulgaria
06 — Before the Rain
Milcho Manchevski · 1994 · North Macedonia

A selection of films about home, displacement, memory and return.

FILM CLUB

Landscape in the Mist (1988) - Greece

Director: Theo Angelopoulos

Our opening film, Landscape in the Mist (1988), offers one of the most moving answers ever put on screen. Directed by Theo Angelopoulos, it follows two children who set out across Greece in search of the father they have never known. What begins as a physical journey gradually becomes a search for identity, belonging, and hope. Along the way, the landscapes they cross reveal as much about home as the destination they seek.

Themes:

- childhood
- journey
- absence
- hope
- belonging

Connection to books:

- Chronicle in Stone
- Free

WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, Landscape in the Mist offers one of the most poignant cinematic reflections on what it means to search for a place , and a person, you have never truly known. The film reminds us that home is not always a destination we can reach, sometimes it is a longing that shapes who we become. Like the books in this issue, it asks whether coming home is about returning to a place or discovering where we belong within ourselves.

FILM CLUB

Eternity and a Day (1998) - Greece

Director: Theo Angelopoulos

A quiet meditation on memory, exile, and the passage of time. As an aging writer forms an unexpected bond with a young migrant boy, the film asks whether home is a place we return to or something we carry within us.

Themes:

- memory
- migration
- aging
- belonging
- time
- human connection

A masterpiece about an aging writer and a young refugee crossing borders.

Connection to books:

- *Free*
- *Three Summers*

WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, Eternity and a Day (1998) offers a deeply moving meditation on memory, time and belonging. As memory and the present quietly intertwine, the film asks what it truly means to return, not only to a place, but to ourselves, to our relationships and to the words left unsaid. Like the books in this issue, Eternity and a Dayreminds us that coming home is often less about crossing a border than about finding peace with the lives we have lived and the memories we continue to carry.

FILM CLUB

Murina (2021) – Croatia

Director: Antoneta Alamat Kusijanović

Why We Chose This Film

Not every journey home is about returning. Sometimes it is about finding the courage to leave.

Set against the breathtaking beauty of the Croatian Adriatic, Murina explores the complicated relationship between home, family, and freedom. Through the eyes of a teenage girl, the island becomes both a sanctuary and a cage, a place of belonging that also limits the future she longs to imagine.

Themes:

- Family
- Inheritance
- Freedom
- Adolescence
- Leaving Home
- Female Coming-of-Age

Connection to books:

- Three Summers
- Free

WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, Murina expands the conversation. It reminds us that home is not always a place we miss; sometimes it is a place we must outgrow in order to discover who we are. The film asks whether love for a place can exist alongside the desire to escape it, and whether leaving home is sometimes the first step towards truly understanding it.

FILM CLUB

Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams (2006) – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Director: Jasmila Žbanić

Why We Chose This Film

Some journeys home begin only after the war has ended.

Set in post-war Sarajevo, Grbavica explores how trauma continues to shape everyday life long after the fighting is over. Through the relationship between a mother and her daughter, the film reveals how silence, memory and love coexist in the aftermath of violence. It asks whether a family can rebuild itself when parts of its history remain unspoken.

WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

Themes

- Motherhood
- Memory
- Silence
- Trauma
- Identity
- Belonging
- Hope

Connection to books:

- Free
- Chronicle in Stone

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, this film offers a powerful reminder that home is not always a place of comfort. Sometimes it is a place where painful memories wait to be acknowledged before healing can begin. Rather than focusing on war itself, the film examines what survives after it: resilience, motherhood and the difficult work of telling the truth

FILM CLUB

The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner (2008) – Bulgaria

Director: Stephan Komandarev

Why We Chose This Film

Sometimes the longest journey home begins after memory has been lost.

The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner follows a grandfather and his grandson as they travel across Europe, playing backgammon while slowly piecing together a past fractured by accident and displacement. What begins as a road trip becomes a journey of remembrance, reconciliation, and rediscovery, revealing that home is not only where we come from, but also what we rebuild through family, memory, and the stories that connect us.

Themes

- Migration
- Family
- Memory
- Identity
- Reconciliation

Connection to Books

- Chronicle in Stone
- Free

WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner (2008) offers a warm and deeply human reflection on memory, family and identity. What begins as a road trip gradually becomes a journey of remembrance, reconciliation and self-discovery. Along the way, the film suggests that home is not simply where we come from, but something we rebuild through stories, relationships and the people who help us remember who we are. Like the books in this issue, it reminds us that coming home is sometimes less about returning to a place than about recovering the parts of ourselves we thought were lost.

FILM CLUB

Before the Rain (1994) – North Macedonia

Director: Milcho Manchevski

Why We Chose This Film

Can we ever truly return to the place we once called home?

One of the defining films of the Balkans, Before the Rain unfolds across North Macedonia and London, weaving together stories of love, violence, and return. Through its interwoven narratives, the film explores how conflict reshapes communities, identities, and personal relationships, revealing that the past is never entirely left behind. As characters move between places and memories, home becomes both a physical landscape and an emotional question.

Themes

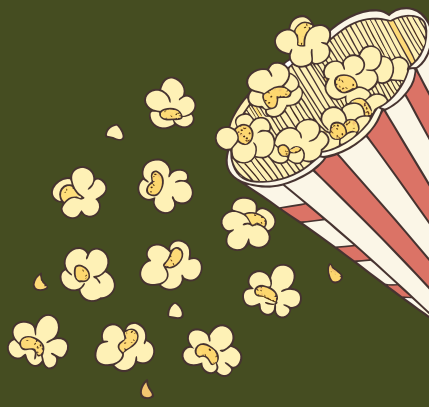
- Memory
- Conflict
- Return
- Identity
- Borders
- Reconciliation

Connection to Books

- The Bridge on the Drina
- Chronicle in Stone

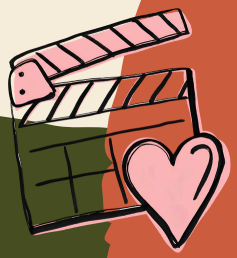
WHY WE CHOSE THIS FILM

For an issue dedicated to Coming Home, Before the Rain reminds us that returning is rarely simple. It asks whether reconciliation is possible after division, whether memory can heal what history has broken, and whether home can still exist when the world we remember has changed.



Continue the Journey

Every review is only the beginning.
If these films speak to you, continue the journey by watching them on platforms such as MUBI, Cinobo, YouTube, or other legal streaming services where they are available.



These films mirror and expand the emotional journey of the books featured in this issue.

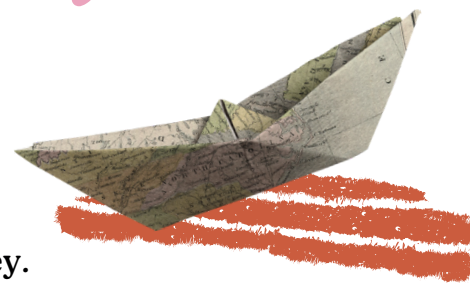
Landscape in the Mist — Searching for home
Eternity and a Day — Remembering home
Murina — Wanting to leave home
Grbavica — Rebuilding home
The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the
Before the Rain — Returning to a home transformed by history

Together, they extend this issue beyond literature, revealing that across Balkan cinema, home is never merely a place. It is a memory carried across generations, a journey shaped by loss and hope, a relationship that binds us to others and an ongoing act of becoming.



ROAD TRIP

A Balkan Summer Playlist



THE ISSUE, IN SOUND & IMAGE

Some songs belong to a country. Others belong to a journey.
These are songs for long roads, open windows, border crossings, summer nights, and the places we carry with us.

A soundtrack for the memories carried through this issue.

Scan. Listen. Remember.
Scan the QR code to explore the YouTube playlist accompanying the first issue of The Balkans Review of Books.

Songs for the road, the border, the summer and the return.

SCAN TO LISTEN

YouTube
playlist

Spotify
CODE

Every Song Gets a Memory
Road Trip – A Balkan Summer Playlist

For many of us, summer in the Balkans begins on the road.

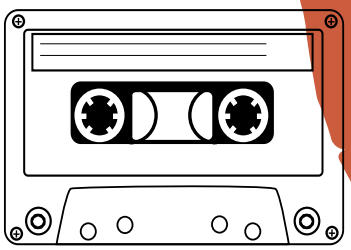
For me, it was the long journey from Greece to Albania, the hours in the car, the familiar landscapes, and the endless waiting at the border. Music was always there.

Some songs belong to particular summers. Others belong to the roads, the people we travelled with, and the places we were returning to.

Because sometimes, a song can carry us home before we even cross the border.

Songs for the road, the border and the return

1. Goran Bregović — Ederlezi
2. Šaban Bajramović — Đelem, Đelem
3. Toše Proeski — Tajno moja
4. Oliver Dragojević — Cesarica
5. Vaçe Zela — Valsi i Lumturisë
6. Nexhmije Pagarusha — Baresha
7. Zülfü Livaneli — Leylim Ley
8. Barış Manço — Gülpembe
9. The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices — Kaval Sviri
10. Goran Bregović — Kalashnikov
11. Elina Duni — Kur më del në derë



THE MEMORY BOX

Balcan Archive



PHOTO BY ILIANA LAMAJ

THE TABLE WE RETURN TO

In the Balkans, the table is more than a place to eat. It is where families gather, guests are welcomed, stories are repeated and food is offered in abundance. A full table is an expression of care, hospitality and belonging , a ritual passed quietly from one generation to the next.

The meal eventually ends, but somehow, we always remember who was sitting around the table.

Balkan Word

τραπεζώματα — trapezómata

The modern Greek τραπέζι (trapézi) comes from Ancient Greek τράπεζα (trápeza), a word that meant not only table, but also the meal laid upon it and, by extension, Food, Gathering. Hospitality, Conversation, Company.

From τραπέζι comes τραπεζώματα (trapezómata) the preparing of a meal for others, the gathering around food, the long, unhurried ritual of sitting together.

It carries a particular ***Greek/Balkan*** feeling: too much food, hours at the table, talking, drinking, remembering, arguing, laughing.

In the Balkans, the table can become a *social centre of memory* where food becomes conversation, and conversation becomes memory.

Sometimes, the meal becomes the memory.

THE MEMORY BOX

Food Memory



PHOTO BY LAMPRINOPOULOU MARIALENA

Stuffed Tomatoes & Peppers

Gemista · Mbushura · Biber Dolma

Ingredients

Tomatoes · peppers · rice · onion · parsley · mint · olive oil · salt · pepper · a little sugar · potatoes

The Story Behind the Dish

I was little when my grandparents came to visit us from Albania. I spoke very little Albanian, and my grandmother understood very little Greek.

One day, my mother had cooked gemista and left me alone with my grandmother. When she returned, she found me crying and shouting:

«Πεινάω! Πεινάω!»

“I’m hungry! I’m hungry!”

My grandmother had no idea what I was saying.

My mother laughed and explained.

The story stayed with us, repeated every time we met, every time we returned to Gjirokastër. A memory that somehow crossed the language between us.

Perhaps that is what food memory does: ***a dish becomes a doorway to a person, a language, a childhood and a place.***

Some recipes are passed down. Some memories are. Sometimes, they become the same thing.

THE SUMMERS WE CARRY

An Editor's Journey Between Memory, Migration and Home

We all carry within us places we can no longer return to, except through memory.

I spent every summer in Albania.

Not at the beach, but in my grandparents' home, in the stone streets of Gjirokastër. Summer had its own rhythm there. My grandmother spread butter over warm bread for breakfast. My grandfather tended the flowers he had planted around the house with the same patience he gave to everything he loved. In the afternoons, I would hear his trumpet drifting through the neighborhood as he rehearsed with the town's brass band before feast days and celebrations.

The house smelled of drying oregano gathered from the mountains and later in the season, of homemade raki distilled from the grapes he had grown himself. Those scents have stayed with me longer than any photograph.

For years, I lived between places. Winters belonged to one country, summers belonged to another. I learned early that home could exist in two languages, two cultures, two versions of myself. There was always an "in between", between departures and arrivals, between long roads and border crossings, between the life I knew in Greece and the summers waiting for me in Albania.

Then one day, those summers ended.

My grandparents are no longer here. The bread is no longer waiting on the kitchen table. The trumpet has fallen silent. The oregano still grows somewhere on those mountains, but I no longer know who gathers it. The city remains, yet it is also a city of memory. I used to wait for summer. Now I sometimes dread it. The world I returned to each summer has become a world I can only return to through remembering.



This first issue could not begin anywhere else.

“The Summers We Carry” is not just about summer. It is about the ***emotional geography of the Balkans***.

For many people from the region, whether they stayed or emigrated, summer is when families reunite, villages come alive, tables grow longer, old languages return and memories are renewed.

This issue is dedicated to Balkan summers remembered through sea, family, migration and return. To grandparents' homes that still exist in our minds exactly as they once were. To faded photographs, ferry rides, border crossings, village festivals, long lunches under grapevines and evenings that seemed endless. To the strange feeling of belonging to more than one place, yet never completely to either.

It is also about returning, not only to a country, but to the versions of ourselves that those places created. Returning to childhood. To stories. To languages we thought we had forgotten. To people who shaped us, even after they are gone.

But perhaps returning is not always comforting.

Sometimes the places remain while the people disappear. Sometimes the streets are still there, but the world we remember is not. Sometimes we dread the season that once brought us home.

Perhaps that is why summer stays with us long after it ends.
Perhaps that is what nostalgia really is.

Not a longing for the past itself, but for the feeling that somewhere, a door is still open, a grandparent is still waiting and summer has not yet ended.

And perhaps this is why some summers stay with us long after they are gone, not because we can return to them, but because they have become part of who we are.

Until next summer.

The Balkans Review of Books
Different places. Different memories. One reading journey.



By Jonisa Dionysia Litsi

Next summer I will return.
Not because the house is waiting.
Not because my grandparents are there.
Not because everything is the same.
I will return because memory asks us to.
The road is different now.
The people have changed.
The flowers bloom without the hands that planted them.
The trumpet no longer echoes through the stone streets.
Yet every time I cross the border, I become a little more myself.
Perhaps that is what home has always been.
Not a place.
But the people who taught us how to remember.

UNTIL NEXT SUMMER

MOSAIC EUROPE

Bridging Educational, Cultural and Social Gaps Across Europe

MOSAIC EUROPE
Bridging Educational, Cultural and Social Gaps Across Europe

Mosaic Europe is a European cultural, educational and social initiative dedicated to creating bridges between people, communities and ideas across Europe and the Balkans.

We believe that stories, education and cultural exchange are not luxuries. They are foundations of belonging, dignity and participation.

Across Europe, many individuals and communities experience life “in between”, between languages, cultures, educational systems, borders and opportunities. Mosaic Europe was created to respond to these gaps by developing inclusive initiatives that connect literature, learning and social impact.

Our mission is to make knowledge, culture and education more accessible while creating spaces where different identities and experiences are recognised as strengths.

The Balkans Review of Books

Launching in 2026, The Balkans Review of Books is the first flagship project of Mosaic Europe: a literary and cultural journal exploring the voices, stories and memories of the Balkans through books, poetry, film and cultural reflection, revealing the region as a landscape of creativity, resilience and shared human experience.

The first issue (0), Coming Home, explores the meanings of memory, childhood, belonging, migration and return asking a universal question:

What does it mean to come home?

The journal marks the beginning of Mosaic Europe’s wider work with children, families, educators and readers, using literature and education to build connections across cultures, languages and generations.

MOSAIC EUROPE
Bridging Educational, Cultural and Social Gaps Across Europe



THE BALKANS REVIEW OF BOOKS

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IMAGE, MEDIA & PRODUCTION CREDITS

1. Cover & Editorial Images

- Cover Image - Gjirokastër, Albania

AI-generated image created specifically for the cover of the pilot issue.

- Table of Contents Image - Belgrade, Serbia

AI-generated image created specifically for the Table of Contents.

- Film Club Image

AI-generated image created specifically for the Film Club section.

Visual Production Note

For the pilot issues, we invited bloggers and contributors to share original photographs. Where suitable contributions were unavailable, AI-generated images have been used for illustration and are clearly identified as such.

2. Book Cover Images

The following book cover images are reproduced for editorial and bibliographic reference:

- Kadare, Ismail. Chronicle in Stone. Canongate Books, 2018. First published in Albanian in 1971.
- Ypi, Lea. Free: Coming of Age at the End of History. Penguin Books, 2022.
- Andrić, Ivo. The Bridge over the Drina. Translated by Lovett F. Edwards. Harvill Press, 1994. First published in 1945.
- Liberaki, Margarita. Three Summers. Penguin Books, 2021. First published in Greek in 1946.
- de Bernières, Louis. Birds Without Wings. Vintage, 2008. First published in 2004.

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3. The Memory Box — Balkan Archive

Photograph: Iliana Lamaj , Submitted for Balkan Archive.

4. Food Memory— Balkan Archive

Photograph: Lamprinopoulou Marialena, Submitted for Balkan Archive.

5. Design & Layout

The issue was designed and laid out entirely in Canva.

Original Canva design:https://www.canva.com/design/DAHRQUpiNP8/q3_5Ox0Lz5XSeGddAixEsw/edit

A Note on Translation, Design & Technology

This issue was created across languages through a combination of human editorial work and digital tools.

For selected texts, artificial intelligence was used as editorial support during translation and language refinement. All such material was reviewed, edited and shaped through human editorial judgment.

The journal's visual design and layout were created in Canva.

We see technology as a bridge: something that can help languages, stories and images travel further, while authorship, interpretation and editorial responsibility remain human.

Next Issue

MEMORY & INHERITANCE

What do we celebrate and what do we pass on?



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Be Part of The Balkans Review of Books

Want to contribute, collaborate, recommend a book, or share an idea?

Get in touch at mosaiceurope.org@gmail.com
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See you next time.

THE BALKANS
REVIEW OF BOOKS