

Title: Black Humor in Danilo Kiš's Tales of the Totalitarian
Author: Sibelan Forrester, Swarthmore College

Yugoslav author Danilo Kiš wrote out of a complex family background: he was born in 1935 in Subotica, in Vojvodina, a former Austro-Hungarian province in the north of Serbia. His father was a Hungarian Jew (whose father had him baptized and changed the family name from Koen to Kiš), which means 'Little' in Hungarian. Kiš's mother was an Orthodox Montenegrin who probably saved her two children's lives when she had them in turn baptized in 1939. Kiš's lyrical, postmodern prose employs an unusual blend of historical/autobiographical and fictional/fantastic elements. One salient trait is the strong element of irony and even black humor in his presentation of historical tragedies, especially the Holocaust and the Stalinist Terror. This paper examines the interplay of history and fiction and the undercurrent of humor in the "novel in seven parts," *Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča* (*A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, 1976), using work by Robert Alter (*Defenses of the Imagination: Jewish Writers and Modern Historical Crisis*), Igor Perišić (*Gola priča: Autopoetika i istorija u ...*), Guy Scarpetta, Karlo Štajner, Yosef Yerushalmi and others.