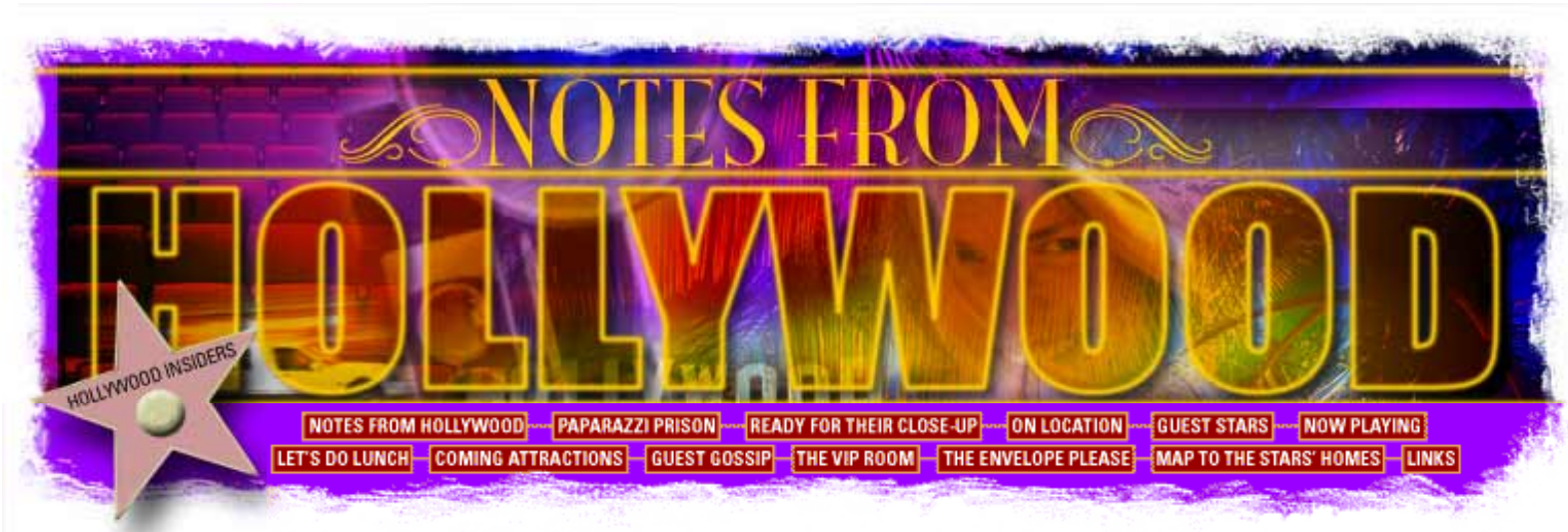




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GUEST STARS



Q & A With Writer, Poet & Artist Bazhe
Author of 'Damages'

Where did you grow up? Was reading and writing a part of your life and why?

I grew up in Former Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia. My parents encouraged me to read literature from all over the world from a very early age. However, when my first work was published they were outraged. They enrolled me in law school because they were frightened of the fact that I might become a writer. They didn't understand my need to write and paint.

Who were your earliest influences?

My earliest influences were Hesse and Selimovic. I enjoyed their philosophical writings. Then I began to read Dostoyevsky. His search of the truth fascinated me. Next was Proust with his psychological analysis that made me more observant.

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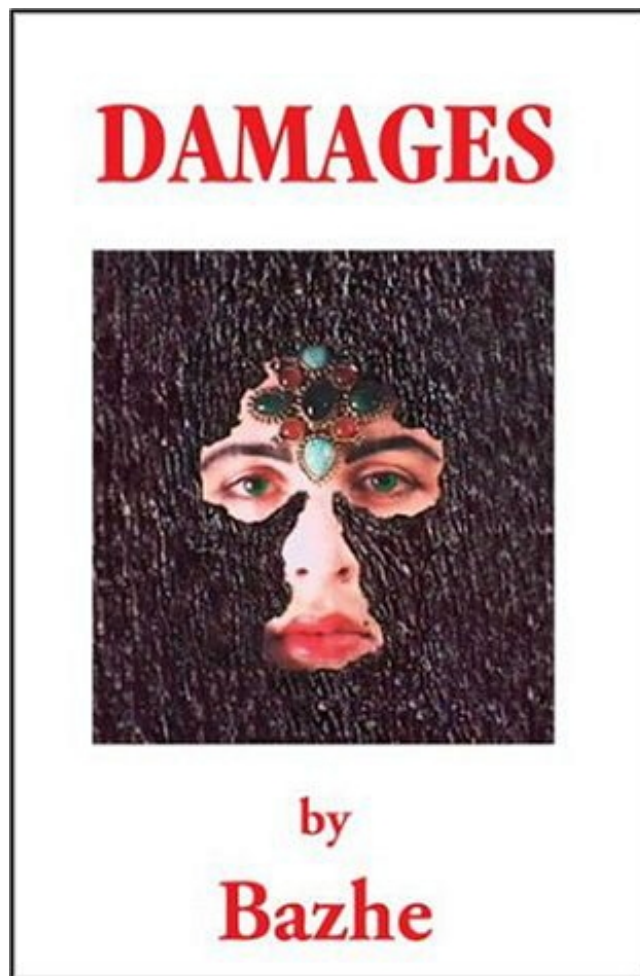
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Why do you write?

I think a person who writes carries conflict and pain. To overcome that conflict and pain, a person writes. Writing is a great way to challenge the denials and the truths in yourself and others around you.



Damages is a very dynamic and unusual memoir of a young man. You write about your young adult life that seems like fiction. Tell us more about it?

I never know just how I will write. I simply let the words flow. Damages is a book where "the truth is stranger than fiction," as the old saying goes. It is based entirely on real events. Of course, to protect the privacy of the participants, many of the names of the characters and specific details about certain events have been changed. Damages is a personal history replete with betrayal from family, friends, relatives, government officials, informants, army recruits, teenage ruffians, hired help, transvestites, nationalists, and Muslim fundamentalists. It is a story about my unconditional love towards my adoptive mother who suffers from cancer and my search for the biological one that I never knew. It is a tale of my inner and outer wars and the journey of self-discovery.

The story begins with the death of my abusive father, a Communist official. My mother was diagnosed with cancer, and I immediately returned to Macedonia to take care of her.

Meanwhile, my more than thirty-year search for my biological mother ended, and I told her my life story, starting with my lonely childhood and adolescence. After finding my "new mother" to be very understanding, I revealed my first gay experience in the army, my

desire for self-realization that caused scandals in the College of National Security, my escape to Turkey where I transformed into a stunning transvestite after meeting a handsome wealthy man, and my return to Yugoslavia where I wandered in the underground world of a country that was falling apart. As Yugoslav nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism rose, I experienced them directly, almost losing my life, but I eventually succeeded in immigrating to America.

You write about the psychological wounds of your childhood, how you worked to overcome them?

My fight to overcome the psychological wounds created by my peculiar upbringing began, when for the first time, I realized that I was manipulated by the adult world. I was very little then. I faced the conflicts boldly and I began to analyze myself and the people around me in order to find my true identity and freedom. It was tough. It was a struggle. But I survived.

Was Damages a difficult or easy book to write? Please explain.

Damages was a very difficult book to write since once more I have to challenge my denials and truths as accurately as possible.

Did the finding of your biological mother help you appreciate your adoptive mother more?

Absolutely. I can't help thinking of Mother, her permission for me to reunite with the biological one, her compromise with her rival, and all for my sake. Mother would have been devastated if she had heard the biological mother's last conversation with me. People are absolutely correct when they say you have only one Mother—not the one who bore you, but the one who raised you. I ultimately discovered that it is my adoptive mother's devotion that is irreplaceable.

What has been your feedback from readers?

Excellent. So far I have not received negative feedback, and the readers are demographically very diverse. I am very happy about it.

Who are your favorite writers and why?

Mostly I love the classic writers. I love Faulkner, Capote, Márquez, Nabokov, Bukowski, Pasolini, Balzac, Salinger, Baldwin, Williams, Conrad, Selby, and Vidal, because of their exquisite style of writing. Their writings are real art. From the poets I adore the love poetry of Rimbaud and Plath, and the bold poetry of Neruda and Lorca. I consider Kushner, Waller, and Ondaatje as exceptional modern writers. I found them fresh and innovative.

What's next?

A fiction book. I would love to write a purely American work of fiction since I am an American now. I just published my poetry book called **Identities**. Identities is about analyzing human manipulations through poetry. The poems deal with greed and ignorance, destruction and war, politics and phoniness, love and hatred, sex and ecstasy, loneliness and loss, and visionary musings of hope.

Next, I am preparing an art book that will include my 50 paintings and philosophical phrases. Then I will have another art show in New York City.

What was the last book you read?

"Candid" by Voltaire. I reread it for fourth time. He is one of the greatest thinkers of Europe.

Tell us about your artwork.

In general human manipulations are the subjects portrayed in my art work.

Do you have any hobbies? How do they enhance your writing and art?

My art, poetry, and garden are my therapies. They purify my body and mind and at the same time recharge them with fresh energy for writing. My message has been always simple: "Aiming for Peace and Love."

Book info:

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About Bazhe:

Bazhe is a writer, poet, and artist. He is the author of **Damages** (creative nonfiction) and **Identities** (poetry book). He has published poems and short stories in Former Yugoslavia. In America, his poems have appeared in: Poetic Voices Magazine, Winter's gems anthology, Bay windows, Opus Literary Review, River run, and Reader. His art has been exhibited in New York City. He lives between NY, NJ, and MA.

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