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South Slavic Writers Since World War II

Edited by
Vera D. Mihaljević
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Plan of the Series

... Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product — when that product is fine and noble and enduring.

Mark Twain*

The advisory board, the editors, and the publisher of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are joined in endorsing Mark Twain's declaration. The literature of a nation provides an inexhaustible resource of permanent worth. We intend to make literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and the reading public, while satisfying the standards of teachers and scholars.

To meet these requirements, *literary biography* has been construed in terms of the author's achievement. The most important thing about a writer is his writing. Accordingly, the entries in *DLB* are career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of his reputation.

The purpose of *DLB* is not only to provide reliable information in a convenient format but also to place the figures in the larger perspective of literary history and to offer appraisals of their accomplishments by qualified scholars.

The publication plan for *DLB* resulted from two years of preparation. The project was proposed to Bruccoli Clark by Frederick C. Ruffner, president of the Gale Research Company, in November 1975. After specimen entries were prepared and typeset, an advisory board was formed to refine the entry format and develop the series rationale. In meetings held during 1976, the publisher, series editors, and advisory board approved the scheme for a comprehensive biographical dictionary of persons who contributed to North American literature. Editorial work on the first volume began in January 1977, and it was published in 1978. In order to make *DLB* more than a reference tool and to compile volumes that individually have claim to status as literary history, it was decided to organize volumes by

*From an unpublished section of Mark Twain's autobiography, copyright by the Mark Twain Company

topic, period, or genre. Each of these freestanding volumes provides a biographical-bibliographical guide and overview for a particular area of literature. We are convinced that this organization—as opposed to a single alphabet method—constitutes a valuable innovation in the presentation of reference material. The volume plan necessarily requires many decisions for the placement and treatment of authors who might properly be included in two or three volumes. In some instances a major figure will be included in separate volumes, but with different entries emphasizing the aspect of his career appropriate to each volume. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is represented in *American Writers in Paris, 1920-1939* by an entry focusing on his expatriate apprenticeship; he is also in *American Novelists, 1910-1945* with an entry surveying his entire career, as well as in *American Short-Story Writers, 1910-1945, Second Series* with an entry concentrating on his short stories. Each volume includes a cumulative index of the subject authors and articles. Comprehensive indexes to the entire series are planned.

The series has been further augmented by the *DLB Yearbooks* (since 1981) which update published entries and add new entries to keep the *DLB* current with contemporary activity. There have also been *DLB Documentary Series* volumes which provide biographical and critical source materials for figures whose work is judged to have particular interest for students. One of these companion volumes is entirely devoted to Tennessee Williams.

We define literature as the *intellectual commerce of a nation*: not merely as belles lettres but as that ample and complex process by which ideas are generated, shaped, and transmitted. *DLB* entries are not limited to "creative writers" but extend to other figures who in their time and in their way influenced the mind of a people. Thus the series encompasses historians, journalists, publishers, book collectors, and screenwriters. By this means readers of *DLB* may be aided to perceive literature not as cult scripture in the keeping of intellectual high priests but firmly positioned at the center of a nation's life.

DLB includes the major writers appropriate to each volume and those standing in the ranks behind them. Scholarly and critical counsel has been sought in deciding which minor figures to include and how full their entries should be. Wherever possible, useful references are made to figures who do not warrant separate entries.

Each *DLB* volume has an expert volume editor responsible for planning the volume, selecting the figures for inclusion, and assigning the entries. Volume editors are also responsible for preparing, where appropriate, appendices surveying the major periodicals and literary and intellectual movements for their volumes, as well as lists of further readings. Work on the series as a whole is coordinated at the Brucoli Clark Layman editorial center in Columbia, South Carolina, where the editorial staff is responsible for accuracy and utility of the published volumes.

One feature that distinguishes *DLB* is the illustration policy—its concern with the iconography of literature. Just as an author is influenced by his sur-

roundings, so is the reader's understanding of the author enhanced by a knowledge of his environment. Therefore *DLB* volumes include not only drawings, paintings, and photographs of authors, often depicting them at various stages in their careers, but also illustrations of their families and places where they lived. Title pages are regularly reproduced in facsimile along with dust jackets for modern authors. The dust jackets are a special feature of *DLB* because they often document better than anything else the way in which an author's work was perceived in its own time. Specimens of the writers' manuscripts and letters are included when feasible.

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." The purpose of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is to compile literary history in the surest way available to us—by accurate and comprehensive treatment of the lives and work of those who contributed to it.

The *DLB* Advisory Board

During World War II, Yugoslavia was the battlefield of many-sided wars, including the internal war between its nations and a politically inspired civil war between the nationalists and communists. Understandably, little of good literature could be written or published. Aside from a few writers and works, most of that literature is evaluated today from almost exclusively a historical point of view.

After World War II all South Slavic writers found themselves in a totally different situation from that before the war. Both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria embraced the communist system at the end of the war, not so much by free will as by the dictates of the victorious partisan forces in Yugoslavia and by the Soviet army in Bulgaria. Writers were expected to accept the new regime—in fact, they were ordered to accept it. As in Russia after the revolution of 1917, in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria the entire way of life changed overnight. Those writers accused of collaboration with the enemy were liquidated; some fought for the communist regime while others willingly embraced it; others felt they had to accept it in order to survive; some writers were prevented from publishing; and a small number found it necessary to emigrate. The moribund ideas of socialist realism were to become the undisputed law of the literary life in the first three postwar years. Literature, like every other walk of life, became a servant of political exigencies.

All that changed in Yugoslavia in 1948, when the country was expelled from the Soviet bloc of nations. Yugoslav communists, led by Josip Broz Tito, deserve credit for standing up to Stalin, which was made possible primarily because the struggle that brought them to power was mostly of their own making (with significant help from the Western allies, to be sure). This new political climate ushered gradual changes in other walks of life, including literature.

Until then, the atmosphere of tight controls, of prescribed themes and methods, and of unabashed glorification of the so-called People's War of Liberation and the building of a new society along communist lines was dominant. The writers who between the wars expounded leftist, if not openly communist, ideas were cleverly giving the tone. Many writers who were hoping to empty their drawers of manuscripts written during the war were eventually convinced that a new era had arrived to stay. Some prominent interwar writers (Ivo Andrić, Miroslav Krleža, Veljko Petrović, Vladimir Nazor, France Bevk, Prežihov Voranc, Alojz Gradnik) welcomed the change and became active in the new society. A certain number refused to cooperate and to appear in print, while several well-known writers were declared

Introduction

enemies and liquidated. Thus, despite the efforts of some new, politically engaged writers, the new epoch in Yugoslav literature was still represented by the already established authors. Through this, literature preserved the continuity, which, in turn, prevented Yugoslav literatures from becoming totally subservient to the establishment and, somewhat later, enabled a freer and saner atmosphere to prevail.

It was Ivo Andrić who gave the breath of life to the new period in literature with his three novels, *The Bridge on the Drina*, *The Chronicle of Travnik* and *Miss (The Woman from Sarajevo)*. However, great as they were, they were somewhat anachronistic at the time. Dealing with the distant past, they contain not a single line of praise for the recent victory over the national enemies. For this was the general tenor of the new literature: the extolling of the heroic deeds of the guerrilla forces and their leadership. In this respect Yugoslav literatures came close to emulating the official dogma of Soviet literature—socialist realism.

Other works at this time were meant to do just that, especially in poetry. But, not surprisingly, aside from Andrić's novels and a few successful poems and stories, not many great works appeared. The established prewar writers, aside from lending their name and prestige, produced little of good new literature. Even those works, officially sanctioned and fostered, which tried to varnish reality and to show life not as it is but as it ought to be, were artistic failures. For some reason, socialist realism never took real hold among Yugoslav writers, except among those more politically than artistically minded.

Then came the year 1948 and the fateful break with the Soviet Union. The impact of this epochal event in the cultural circles was commensurate to that in other walks of life. Since the cultural developments normally move more cautiously and do not show immediate symptoms, it took writers another year or two to call for action. After the first stirring and demands for change, the struggle between the "old" and the "new" forces quickly developed into a full-fledged cultural war. This was best manifested in 1952 at the writers' congress, with the venerable writer Miroslav Krleža giving the tone by demanding freedom of creativity. The opposing forces were composed of the defenders of the status quo, called the realists, and the challengers, labeled the modernists because of their advocacy of greater freedom, above all the freedom to experiment. To be sure, by the label realists the modernists did not always have socialist realism in mind, and, conversely, the realists did not always label the modernists reactionary, decadent, and removed from reality. It would be a

mistake, therefore, to assume that the fronts were always clearly drawn or that the realists were exclusively the supporters of the regime whereas the modernists, in their opposition to the existing literary situation, were always opposing the entire political system. In both camps were those who believed that the nature of state government should not be questioned at all and that the controversy should be confined to artistic matters. The fact that some of the leading figures of the interwar leftist, procommunist surrealist movement (Marko Ristić, Aleksandar Vučo, Oskar Davičo) were among the modernists certainly gave the lie to the realists' argument that the modernists were decadent, irresponsible, or even hostile to the new order. There was indeed an irony in this reversal of roles. Between the wars, the surrealists were the forerunners of the wrecking crew whose task was to undermine and eventually bring down the bourgeois order of the monarchy. For this purpose they used the most ruthless methods, attacking the very foundations of bourgeois "conservative" and "reactionary" morality. After the war the surrealists rose again, this time against their own brethren, whose path they helped to clear, indeed of whose cloth they themselves were made. But if there was an irony in the new situation, the surrealists were certainly consistent. And while they were destructive in their previous efforts, they were now playing a constructive role in bringing about the relaxation of tension and a considerable amount of freedom in artistic creativity by the end of the 1950s.

The struggle reached its climax in 1955. The realists, gathered around the magazine *Savremenik* (Contemporary), defended their positions ineptly, relying more on the support from party officials than on the force of their arguments. Their view was that literature must, first of all, serve society, that society is governed by immutable Marxist laws, and that any deviation from the straightforward, socially tinged depiction of reality represents a malignant growth of formalism, aestheticism, etc. The modernists, gathered around the magazine *Delo* (Action), refuted these views as undemocratic, constrictive, and stale. They demanded the abolition of dictates by the authorities, a greater freedom of creativity, and, above all, freedom to experiment.

Generally speaking, the struggle was most keenly felt in Serbia and Slovenia, while Croatia was relatively calm at the time. Belgrade bore the brunt of the battles due, undoubtedly, to the centralization of the state. Although there were some non-Serbs writing in Belgrade, it was primarily the Serbs who initiated and carried the battle and suffered the consequences most acutely. This in no way implies that writers of other nationalities were indifferent to the issues at stake or docilely supporting the status quo.

Toward the end of the controversy, about the middle of the 1950s, a new note was injected by the so-called second generation of postwar writers (Vasko Popa, Miodrag Pavlović, Stevan Raičković, Branko Miljković, Miodrag Bulatović, Vesna Parun, Slavko

Mihalić, Milivoj Slaviček, Cene Vipotnik, Ciril Zlobec, Andrej Hieng, and others). The struggle ended in the triumph of the modernists, expressed not through wild celebration and vendetta, but through a somber, deeply satisfying enjoyment of the hard-won freedom.

Since that battle, the situation on the Yugoslav literary scene has been characterized by a steady growth of freedom, by a steady influx of extremely gifted writers, and by total opening to the world. Every now and then the authorities would attempt to assert their might in prosecuting and even jailing some writers, but by and large the writers have been able to develop and express themselves with a great amount of freedom.

The war in the former Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1990s has had repercussions among the writers as well. Even before the country was split into several independent entities, the writers fought their own war among themselves. The monolithic Union of Yugoslav Writers foreshadowed the deep division among the nationalities by the demands of the Croatian and Slovene writers in the late 1980s that it be disbanded, which eventually took place in 1990. The writers went their own nationalistic ways, and individual literatures function today as totally independent bodies. In reality this is how it has been ever since Yugoslavia was created in 1918 and re-created in 1945. It should be pointed out that there is no Yugoslav literature as such; this term is used for expedience only. After 1990, even the pretext of unity was dropped. Due to the cruelty of the third Balkan War, the chances are that they will not be considered as one again, which is how it should be, after all.

None of this struggle existed in Bulgaria from 1944, when the Soviet army "liberated" the country, until the early 1990s, when, with the fall of communism in the Soviet Union, for the first time in almost five decades the Bulgarian writers were free to express themselves according to their own artistic dictates. Until that time, generally speaking, Bulgarian post-World War II literature was weaker in comparison to any period in the preceding centuries. Drastic political and social changes dictated by the communist regime led to a noticeable drop in the quality of literature, though it was not lacking in quantity. Of all South Slavic literatures, the Bulgarian suffered the most from the imposition of political dictates. Nevertheless, in addition to scores of writers of limited skills who tried to give life to the moribund method of socialist realism, others managed to preserve their dignity and to produce works of redeeming quality. Among these are Blaga Dimitrova (1922-), Atanas Dalchev (1904-), Dimitur Talev (1898-1966), Emilijan Stanev (1907-1979), Anton Donchev (1930-), Pavel Vezhinov (1914-), Nikolay Khaitov (1919-), and Jordan Radichkov (1929-). The fortitude of these writers was rewarded by recent developments in Bulgaria and by the rejection of political controls in literature after almost half a century of ideological bondage. It is too early to tell whether the political changes will lead to total rejuvenation of literary life,

but it seems that a better future is in store for Bulgarian literature.

Thanks to Krleža, Croatian literature after World War II escaped the clutches of socialist realism. The present-day situation is marked by freedom of expression, a wide-open relationship with world literatures, and the sophistication that comes from a rich tradition of the preceding accomplishments. Ranko Marinković (1913-), Jure Kaštelan (1919-1990), Vesna Parun (1922-), Mirko Božić (1919-), and Slavko Mihalić (1928-), among others, lead the long list of accomplished writers and rising talents. The developments in the early 1990s led to the fulfillment of a cherished dream of total independence from "Yugoslav" association.

It was not until after World War II that the Macedonians were allowed to exist as a separate nation (within the Republic of Yugoslavia, to be sure) and to publish unhindered in their own language. The adoption of a Western Macedonian dialect around Prilep as an official literary language, formulated by a leading poet and scholar, Blaž Koneski, and others, enabled the writers to write in one language for the first time. In a relatively short time since, Macedonian literature has been able not only to make up for lost time, but also to produce works that have attracted the world's attention and admiration. Having bypassed, of necessity, entire periods and movements, such as Romanticism, realism, symbolism, and others, the writers have been able to get in step with modern trends in world literature quickly and remarkably well.

The lion's share in this endeavor belongs to the brothers Dimitrije (1810-1862) and Konstantin Miladinov (1830-1862), Kosta Kočo Racin (1908-1943), Blaž Koneski (1921-1993), Slavko Janevski (1920-), and Aco Šopov (1923-1982), who in their early works proved that Macedonian writers were equal to their peers in Yugoslavia. Racin published in 1939 the first book of modern poetry, *Beli mugri* (White Dawns), and Janevski the first Macedonian novel, *Selo zad sedumte jasevi* (The Village behind the Seven Aspens, 1953), while the books of verse by Koneski and Šopov were of decisive influence in the further development of Macedonian poetry. These writers were joined later by new generations of poets, fiction writers, and playwrights, such as the poets Bogumil Gjuzel (1939-), Vlada Urošević (1934-), and Radovan Pavlovski (1937-); the fiction writers Georgi Abadžiev (1910-1963), Jordan Leov (1920-), Simon Drakul (1930-), and Živko Čingo (1935-1987); and the playwrights Kole Čašule (1921-), and Goran Stefanovski (1952-). The vibrancy of the ever-increasing number of new writers is typical of a young literature, even if their roots go back centuries. Indicative of this vitality is the renowned "Struga Poetry Evenings," which every summer gathers writers from all over the world at the Lake of Ohrid for the celebration of poetry.

The Second World War, with all its implications and changes for the peoples of Yugoslavia, initially brought about a new wind in Serbian literature—

socialist realism. It lasted only a short time, however, due to further political changes. From 1948 on, Serbian literature was pretty much free to follow its own designs and tendencies. It was preceded by three novels of Ivo Andrić (1892-1975), all published in 1945. Their sweeping portrayal of the diverse peoples of Bosnia and the artistic creation of characters earned Andrić the Nobel Prize in 1961—the only South Slav writer to be so honored. He was followed by many accomplished writers, first by those who had their beginnings in the previous period and then by postwar writers who continued in the tradition of Serbian literature but also changed it for the better. Among many noteworthy authors, several have become internationally known: Vasko Popa (1922-1991), Miodrag Pavlović (1928-), and Ivan V. Lalić (1931-) in poetry; and Dobrica Ćosić (1921-), Meša Selimović (1910-1982), Danilo Kiš (1935-1989), and Milorad Pavić (1929-) in fiction. Their ranks are being strengthened by a steady stream of newcomers. The present-day literature in Serbia is characterized by openness, despite sporadic political restrictions; by sophistication and cosmopolitanism; and by a desire to transcend local boundaries. It may be too early to pass the final judgment on the achievements of the contemporary generation, but it would be correct to say that they have already moved Serbian literature ahead by several leaps in comparison to the previous generations.

Most of the Slovene interwar authors continued to be active after World War II. After a short and abortive experiment with socialist realism, they opened up to the world influences. Today, in keeping step with other literatures, Slovenes employ a wide array of approaches accompanied by genuine talent and sophistication. Poetry is the dominant genre, and poets such as Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981), Dane Zajc (1929-), Gregor Strniša (1930-1987), Veno Taufer (1933-), and Tomaž Šalamun (1941-), despite being different in many respects, all contribute to the profile of a literature whose high quality is internationally recognized.

As in the first volume of the South Slav literatures, individual literatures have been arranged alphabetically in order to forestall the potential accusation of nationalistic bias. Within literatures the authors have also been arranged alphabetically, although a chronological arrangement could have been used as well. The selection of the authors is based on their generally recognized reputation as recorded in literary histories. The inclusion or exclusion of some authors may be debatable, but those represented in this volume have all left their marks on the respective literatures and exerted strong influence on other writers. The choice of contributors has been dictated by their availability outside of the countries involved. Qualified scholars abroad have been by and large preferred to native scholars, for practical and other reasons. Although a good number of the contributors are themselves native of South Slavic countries, their spending most of their adult life abroad has enabled

them to acquire fresh vistas in analyzing the writers without neglecting the traditional approach. They have arrived at their opinions mostly on their own rather than by depending heavily on secondary sources. As is customary with the *DLB* series, they have concentrated on the lives and works rather than engaging in abstract discussions. Special attention has been given to the bibliographic material because in many instances the writers under discussion are presented here for the first time to the English-speaking world. Following the established practice of the series, the first editions are listed chronologically under Books, and translations, if any, are listed after original works; those interested in a complete list of translations into English should consult the all-encompassing bibliographies compiled by Vasa D. Mihailovich and Mateja Matejić (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1984, and supplements). In some instances, works in lesser genres are listed under Other and Periodical Publications. Secondary sources, where available, are listed under Letters, Bibliographies, and Biographies, as well as under References. The latter has concentrated on the most important sources, to avoid cluttering; those published in English have been listed exhaustively, while those in the respective languages, which are often inaccessible to the outside readers, have been restricted for practical reasons to the most outstanding ones. Finally, a Papers section is listed whenever known; the war conditions in the Balkans in the first half of the 1990s, however, sometimes made it difficult to ascertain where the papers are deposited.

For a list of translations of primary works into English and a chronology of important events, authors, and works, see *DLB 147: South Slavic Writers before World War II*.

The editor is grateful to the contributors for their labor of love, without which the volume would have been very difficult to complete. Similarly, gratitude is expressed to the publishers for their understanding and highly professional work, especially in obtaining necessary information and illustrations under rather difficult conditions due to the war.

It is hoped that this volume, along with *DLB 147*, will help in informing the general public in the English-speaking world about South Slav literatures, which until now have been known outside of their respective countries only to a small circle of specialists. It is also hoped that these volumes will lead to additional endeavors toward the same goal, so that eventually the achievements of these writers will receive their well-deserved due in the family of world literature.

—Vasa D. Mihailovich

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

a	father or mother
e	well or set
i	seek or sick
o	go or ball

u	blue or too or put
j	yell or boy
lj	million or brilliant
nj	canyon or new
dj, ğ	residue
c	cats
ć, k	tune
č	church
š	she
ž	pleasure
dž	George
h	Bach
ü	earth

All other letters are pronounced the same way as in English. Some of the examples above are approximations because sometimes there are no exact equivalents in English.

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