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The Columbia Guide to the Literatures of Eastern Europe Since 1945

Harold B. Segel

Albania (and Kosovo), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia,
Czech Republic, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Macedonia,
Poland, Romania, Serbia (and Montenegro), Slovakia, Slovenia



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Preface

The purpose of this book is to equip the reader with a substantial reference work to the literatures of Eastern Europe, including the former East Germany, in the second half of the twentieth century, or, more specifically, from the end of World War II in 1945 to the beginning of a new century. No such reference work, embracing all the countries of the region including the German Democratic Republic for the duration of its existence, is currently available. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the reunification of East Germany and West Germany, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate states, Eastern Europe presents a more complex picture of peoples and cultures than ever before. By means of both its primary focus on the second half of the twentieth century—which brought a new world order to Eastern Europe and then witnessed its collapse—and its breadth of coverage, this book seeks to reduce such complexity to manageable proportions.

When the sole authorship of this book was proposed to me by then Assistant Director for Reference Publishing at Columbia University Press, James Raimés, it seemed a daunting task. How effectively, in fact, could one individual, even if appropriately equipped linguistically, deal with the variety of literatures involved? But the challenge, even with the risks it carried, was too enticing to turn aside without making at least a fair try. Further refining of language skills, extensive travel throughout the region, and far wider reading in the field than ever before rewarded this East Europeanist with a sense of gratification at coming to grips at last with the entirety of the area of his professional interest within the time frame of the book. In finally seeing this project through to its conclusion, I hope that notwithstanding the many obstacles and pitfalls, I have acquitted myself in a fair and balanced way. Although it may be restating the obvious to those who know me and my work, I have no ethnic, cultural, or professional biases that would in any way have impinged on the evenhandedness of this project. Having said this, I should make clear that this evenhandedness was defined by me as trying where possible and without any undue imbalance to give a little more weight to those literatures that are still not particularly well known within the Eastern European context. As the sole author of this book, I also bear the heavy weight of sole responsibility for any of its shortcomings—be they linguistic, interpretive, or factual—as well as for less than felicitous compromises inevitable in a text of this nature.

I was flattered that James Raimés originally invited me to undertake this project, and I enjoyed our working relationship for the time that he was at Columbia University Press. Further cooperation with his successor, James Warren, and especially my principal editor, Irene Pavitt, kept the project on an even keel; their support and encouragement have meant a great deal to me. I received much assistance from libraries, booksellers, and academics throughout Eastern Europe and offer a collective acknowledgment of gratitude to them.

The Organization of the Book

The principal parts of this book present a reasonably broad but concise overview of literary developments in Eastern Europe from 1945 to the present and almost 700 author entries, arranged in strict alphabetical order, that represent the various national literatures. The narrative overview is topical rather than chronological. The rationale for this is essentially practical. It obviously would have been impossible to do justice to the different literatures—thirteen since the fragmentation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the official separation of the Czechs and Slovaks in 1993—in the format of the conventional literary history, in which authors are treated in chronological order and/or by literary genre. Moreover, this book is not intended to be a compilation of national literary histories in miniature. The topical division chosen as the ordering principle for the opening survey seeks primarily to relate literary developments to the defining moments in the post-World War II history of the Eastern European peoples.

The author entries are intended to provide the most salient information about the writers and their works. Although the effort was made to be as inclusive as possible, in view of the intended Anglophone readership for the book preference was given initially to writers available in English translation. Fortunately, a very large number of works by Eastern European writers have been translated into English, clearly attesting to the broad interest in the region both during and following the collapse of communism. The criterion of available English translations was soon discarded, however, and no writer judged worthy of being included in the book was excluded simply because his or her works have not been translated into English.

In considering authors for possible inclusion, I also established other criteria. Older writers whose careers developed primarily in the interwar period or largely in emigration, such as the Croatian Miroslav Krleža and the Pole Witold Gombrowicz, were omitted in order to better accommodate those authors who made their literary debuts only after World War II and, especially, younger writers who began coming to prominence in the last three decades of the twentieth century. The criterion for the older author was his or her literary activity after 1945. Needless to say, I would have liked to include an even larger number of authors than the nearly 700 now present. But choice had to be based on the individual writer's relative importance and the need to keep a fair and impartial balance in the representation of the national literatures covered by this book. This is especially important in the case of the former Yugoslavia, for which entries for Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Slovenian writers would have been subentries under the single rubric of "Yugoslavia" before that country's breakup. Compromises also were inevitable in order to keep the book to a reasonable size. As it is, a larger volume evolved than had originally been planned.

Apart from basic biographical and literary historical information, the author entries include some descriptive and critical material, although for obvious reasons of space this had to be kept within strict limits. The more important the writer and the text, the more expansive the entry. The entries are not intended to be uniform throughout in either the scope of coverage or the order in which data are presented. Each entry also contains information about the secondary literature on the author, with preference, where possible, given to works in English. This material is grouped under the heading "Literature." The information on translations, grouped under the heading "Translations" at the end of each entry, is very comprehensive, since it was felt that such material would constitute an important resource of the

book. The translations are listed in alphabetical order, beginning with books and followed by such individual works as poems, stories, and plays. For works that have not been translated into English, available French, German, Italian, and Russian translations are mentioned in light of the widespread knowledge of these languages, especially in the academic community.

Several sections of a practical nature follow the preface: a brief chronology of important political events, organized by country; a guide to the English translations of titles of Eastern European newspapers and periodicals in order to avoid duplication throughout the author entries; and a note on orthography, transliteration, and titles. A list of the authors included in the book, arranged by country, appears as the index.

A general bibliography appears at the end of the book. It lists references to books and articles only in English and is itself divided into two major parts. The first contains works of a general nature on Eastern Europe, primarily but not exclusively after 1945. The second cites works, listed by country, that fall into four categories: histories, literary histories, anthologies, and monographs on genres and movements. All information regarding translations and individual writers appears in the author entries.