

with an intriguing political system, which has led to a heightened interest in its literature. The only genre of contemporary Yugoslav literature which seems to be poorly represented in English translation is drama. Qualitatively, it is not inferior to either Yugoslav poetry or prose; thus, one can only speculate about the possible reasons for its underrepresentation in English translation.

Branko Mikasinovich's book, *Five Modern Yugoslav Plays*, may be viewed as an attempt to end this "discrimination" against Yugoslav drama. It provides English-speaking readers with five representative samples of this genre. The "Yugoslav" character of the book is emphasized by the fact that the authors represented are of Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian ethnic backgrounds.

Mikasinovich is not the translator of any of the plays published in this book; translations were done by Nikola Koljevich, Elliot Anderson, Tomaž Šalamun, David Mladinov, Roberta Reeder, Ilija Čašule, and Daša Drndić. Nevertheless, Mikasinovich's contribution to this book is both important and manifold. In his introduction, he presents a survey of the history and development of Yugoslav drama, from its beginnings until the present. Although necessarily brief, the survey does register major authors and works in this genre.

Another contribution by Mikasinovich is the competent selection of plays. Written in the 1955–62 period, they adequately reflect the characteristic trends, literary techniques, and the basic quality of contemporary Yugoslav drama. Furthermore, the themes treated in these five plays are also characteristic of modern drama in Yugoslavia. Djordje Lebovič's *Hallelujah* portrays the psychology of former inmates of prison camps affected by their past experiences. Primož Kozak's *An Affair* is concerned with the problem of freedom and responsibility. The conflict between reality and illusion is presented in Ranko Marinković's *Gloria*. Kole Čašule's *Darkness* handles the favorite theme of early post-World War II literature: the revolution and national identity. Finally, Aleksandar Obrenović's *The Bird* examines some existential conditions and digressions of the "common man." The text of each play is preceded by a short biography of its author. There is no indication as to who prepared the biographical sketches, but one assumes that they were written by Mikasinovich.

One criticism of the volume concerns inconsistency in transliteration and spelling. On the same page (p. 87) one finds both Salamun and Šalamun. In spite of the fact that "A Note on Pronunciation and Spelling" is provided (p. xi), the proposed system is disregarded and the arbitrary use of *š* and *sh*, *j* and *y*, *ć* and *ch* is evident.

Nevertheless, *Five Modern Yugoslav Plays* is not only a credit to contemporary Yugoslav drama, but to Branko Mikasinovich as well.

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LIFE IN THE TOMB. By *Stratis Myrivilis*. Translated by *Peter Bien*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1977. xxii, 329 pp. \$13.50.

*Life in the Tomb* is one of the major novels of modern Greece by one of that country's most important writers, Stratis Myrivilis (1892–1969). Born on the island of Lesbos (Mytilene), Myrivilis began publishing in 1914 with a collection of short stories, entitled *Red Stories*, and, following a modest publishing career (that included four novels), was nominated for the Nobel Prize in the 1960s, an honor shared only by a handful of his countrymen.

Myrivilis is known primarily for his World War I trilogy, of which *Life in the Tomb* is the first and best-known volume. Ironically, the second and third volumes of the trilogy, *The Schoolmistress With the Golden Eyes* (1933) and *The Mermaid Madonna* (1949), were translated into English long before the first, the third book

appearing first in 1959, followed by the second in 1964. The novel was begun in 1917 in the trenches of Serbian Macedonia, serialized in the Mytilenean newspaper *Kampana* in 1923, then reworked and republished in its final form in 1930. Eighty thousand copies in nine editions were sold (a phenomenal number for Greece) and the book appeared in eight languages other than Greek (French, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Italian, Czech, Rumanian, Hungarian, and Turkish) before it appeared in English. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its great popularity, it was removed from circulation in 1936 by the Metaxas regime, and was unavailable until the German occupation ended in 1944.

With such a history, one might have expected a work of Kazantzakian stature, replete with characters set in a heroic mode. We are, instead, presented with the statement of a simple man who details the senselessness of war through characters who, caught up by the great machine of war, are subjected to its impersonal dehumanization. Fictionalizing his own personal experiences, Myrivilis uses the pretext of a discovered cache of unsent letters. The work is handled as a series of anecdotal expressions, whose only continuity lies in the monstrous hypothesis of war itself, which overrides the pieces and ties them together irrevocably. The noncontinuous thread of events provides considerable flexibility which, however, nearly buries the slight narrative framework in expository ramblings. The value of *Life in the Tomb* lies in the presentation by an author of great sensibility of his firsthand experiences of the horrors of war. Myrivilis's framing of those experiences as a lyrical statement blending into extended imagery provides for an odd mixture which, though it is not always successful, is at times highly penetrating.

Peter Bien's painstaking translation completes the English rendition of Myrivilis's World War I trilogy. As in Bien's translation of Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, this work again demonstrates the care this translator gives to the precise meaning of each phrase, care that in some instances effaces Myrivilis's own earthiness for a more polished and intellectual English.

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OPERA SELECTA: RUSSISCHE GEGENWARTSSPRACHE, RUSSISCHE SPRACHGESCHICHTE, PROBLEME DER SLAVISCHEN SPRACHWISSENSCHAFT. By *Alexander Isačenko*. Forum Slavicum, vol. 45. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976. 440 pp. DM 98.

Born in Russia in 1911, Isačenko was educated in Austria, where he completed his Slavistic training under Trubetzkoy. He taught for many years in Bratislava, then Olomouc, East Germany, and Prague. He spent a number of semesters at UCLA, and in recent years he headed the Slavic department in Klagenfurt, Austria, where he died in March 1978.

Isačenko's profound, quasi-native intimacy with Slovak and Czech, buttressed by a thorough practical command of standard Slovene and decades-long study of the Carinthian dialects of Austria have given him unique insight into problems of comparative Slavic linguistics and the sociolinguistic questions of developing standard languages. Teaching Russian through the mediums of Slovak, German, and Czech focused his attention on a series of problems which had been neglected both by native Russians and by non-Slavic Russists. His association with Trubetzkoy during the height of the creative activity of the Prague Linguistic Circle helped assure that Isačenko's approach to language and culture would remain fresh and critical. No dogmatist, he has successfully utilized the insights of new linguistic theories and methods. Among his published works, the most influential has surely been *Gram-*