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Review Of "Cat Painters: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry" Edited By D. D. Obradović And D. Djurić

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akovsky translated Voltaire's play and alluded to it "as a source for Sumarokov" (151). Ospovat cites Marcus Levitt's "Sumarokov's Russianized *Hamlet*" (*Early Modern Russian Letters: Texts and Contexts*, Academic Studies Press, 2009, pp. 86–87): "*Gamlet* centers on the metaphysical problem of 'the existence of evil (for example, in Claudius)' and 'the working out of divine theodicy on earth'" (147). Here, as elsewhere, Ospovat's view is that tragedy was, in eighteenth-century Russia somewhat as in seventeenth-century France, a serious dramatic representation of the legitimacy of sovereignty with the necessary collaboration of the nobility. Ospovat focuses in turn on the "drama of the coup d'état" (146 ff.), the prince's melancholy (171 ff.), "investigations of malice" (200 ff.), and the "catharsis of pardon" (216 ff.).

Quotations from *Khorev* come from the early edition, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii* (10 vols.; 1747), which I have been unable to access online. Iu. V. Stennik used a later, abridged version of the play in his edition of Sumarokov's *Dramaticheskie sochineniia*, 1990.

The original version of *Gamlet* is available online: <http://www.azlib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0020oldorfo.shtml>. In both plays, Ospovat cuts and pastes citations with disregard for the original poetic aspect. The worst example is the excerpt from *Gamlet*'s soliloquy (Act I, scene i) from which Ospovat cites lines 11–17. To the beginning of line 17, "I svobodni grazhdan" ("and the freedom of the citizens"), he juxtaposes (same typographic line) lines 33–35 from scene ii, "Uzhasnyi son!..." ("a terrible dream..."). (Note: "Svobodni" instead of "svobodny" occurs in the online version of *Gamlet*.) The reference is unclear: "1.1–2.61–62" (158). Instead of giving literal translations, Ospovat cites Richard Fortune's translations (Sumarokov, *Selected Tragedies*, pp. 89–90), which are of minimal use to anyone trying to follow closely Sumarokov's Russian discourse.

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Biljana D. Obradović and Dubravka Djurić, ed. *Cat Painters: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry*. [New Orleans, LA]: Diálogos Books, 2016. xliii + 450 pages. Biographical notes. Index. \$29.95 (paper).

Cat Painters: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry is a rich anthology of seventy-one poets listed chronologically, from the late Vujica Resin Tucić and Judita Šalgo (both born in 1941) to Jelena Savić (born in 1981). Thirty-two of the poets, almost half, are women, which marks a departure from every earlier anthology of Serbian poetry, continuing the trend over time toward greater gender balance in representing the major figures of a literature.

The preface by L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet Charles Bernstein and the two opening pages of blurbs from well-known (mostly) poets position the book for non-Slavist readers. Perhaps this is the most advantageous approach to presenting the book, since only a small number of programs in North America teach Serbian literature or literatures of the Balkans in general. The cover image, a cat-faced parody of a 1938 self-portrait by Serbian painter Milena Pavlović-Barili, means that you will always instantly recognize this handsome volume on your table. Though it seems primarily to address the creative writing profession, it is a milestone for Slavists as well.

Biljana D. Obradović is a poet based in the United States, and her introduction outlines the project and its history. A second introduction mainly by Belgrade poet Dubravka Djurić gives a sweeping history of Serbian language and literature, with copious and useful information, but it should have been better edited for English: it may be recommended to students or other curious readers, but with apologies for its uneven style. An otherwise helpful pronunciation guide (xlii) oddly states that Serbian e is pronounced "æ as in bad," though few language teachers would agree. Unfortunately, the translations too are sometimes poorly proofread, with both typographical errors and slips in the language that will make sense to language teachers but should have

been eliminated. On the other hand, the diacritical marks in every Serbian name are perfectly rendered, which is not always the case for publications outside the country.

Since most poets included are still alive, ranging in age from their mid-thirties to seventy, the collection offers not a settled canon but a thought-provoking selection of work. The biographical information for each poet often includes detailed information: prizes won, books published, and professional activities—not surprisingly, many studied at the University of Belgrade or have worked as editors. The lists of prizes won, often named for important earlier writers, tacitly give a glimpse at the earlier poetic canon of Serbia.

The editors, who include themselves among the poets selected, scan the Serbian poetic scene for a wide variety of poets, some writing in more traditional and others in more avant-garde styles. The chronological order happens to put Obradović and Djurić right next to each other, which makes very clear that they differ significantly from each other as poets. If anything, the editors tend to favor poets with more leftist styles; several write in opposition to recent Serbian government positions or are associated with the important journal *ProFemina*. Given the skew toward male poets in earlier anthologies, the intentional welcome of women can only be a good thing. In generic terms, this reviewer was particularly struck by the number of poets writing haiku in Serbia. Well-known or new, the poets have almost all previously been translated into English. Poetry in Serbia can be harder to follow now than it has often been in the past (books in tiny print runs may quickly go out of print), and this makes the anthology informative even for a specialist.

The quality of the translations is high; many are truly a pleasure to read, though here too there are occasional hiccups in the English, or commas placed in the wrong spot. These small errors are irritating precisely because the volume is otherwise admirable. A reviewer of translations should never nitpick over word choice, but poetry must be done *right*, and word choice or matters of interpretation differ from simple slips in the English. A reader might be tempted to some additional editing, especially before passing a poem along to students or colleagues.

It is curious that some of the poets are represented (sometimes exclusively) by work written originally in English. “Serbian” is understood quite broadly: the selection reflects not only writing in Serbian, but writing from Serbian poets who have left the country (but who left it as adults?). Laudably, there are several poets from different ethnic groups (Hungarian, Roma) from within Serbia.

Co-editor Obradović is the book’s primary translator, but there are numerous others, too many to list them all. A few are poets whose own work is elsewhere in the volume, while others are translators based in Serbia. A few are well-known writers themselves (David Albahari, Charles Simic). A few authors have translated themselves or collaborated with Obradović. The selection of translations is as informed as the selection of poets.

At over 400 pages, it would truly have been prohibitive to make this a bilingual anthology. In many cases the book points to an audio version of one or another poem on the publisher’s web site. I went to <http://www.dialogosbooks.com/Serbia> as suggested (accessed 2/5/2017), but the page had no visible links to audio files. Audio versions would be a wonderful addition to the printed book, especially for anyone who wishes to use this rich collection for teaching. At this reasonable price, one could even require students to buy the book for a literature class. Despite a few nagging imperfections, *Cat Painters* is a significant achievement that has something for everyone, and co-editors Djurić and Obradović are very much to be congratulated.

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