

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF VUK STEFANOVIĆ KARADŽIĆ, 1787–1864: LITERACY, LITERATURE, AND NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE IN SERBIA. By *Duncan Wilson*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970. xv, 415 pp. \$12.50.

This book, prepared while the author was British ambassador in Belgrade, is the best on any aspect of South Slavic cultures written in English in more than a decade. Since there is no single past political figure whom the Serbs universally admire, the centennial of Vuk's death in 1964 was a major event in Yugoslavia, and Wilson's interest was heightened as a result. The book is better history than biography; the author deals effectively with the circumstances surrounding Vuk's life, for he interprets Vuk in relation to Serbia's national destiny.

Wilson writes with grace and wit. He is objective and nonpartisan about men who were partisan to their very marrow. He says plainly that he has learned nearly all he knows about Vuk through the instruction and guidance of his scholarly acquaintances (principally Yugoslav). He has supplied his book with extensive samples in his own translation from the various genres of Vuk's literary legacy; they are adequate but prosaic. Yet the value of this book rests in more than the copious—if secondhand—information it contains. Wilson sees the patterns of consequence in the history of Vuk's age, and describes them realistically and succinctly. Apart from his useful interpretation of that history, he tells essentially the same facts about Vuk as Miodrag Popović did in his biography, *Vuk Stef. Karadžić, 1787–1864* (Belgrade, 1964), but without that author's mawkish eloquence. Neither Popović's nor Wilson's biography replaces the older one by Ljubomir Stojanović, *Život i rad Vuka Stef. Karadžića* (Belgrade and Zemun, 1924), which remains the only full *intimate* study of Vuk the man, from the question of his ancestry to such private details as the nature of his lameness, his personal budget, and his dietary habits.

Yet the amount of biographical detail in the Stojanović book obscures understanding of Vuk's effect outside his own private sphere, and that kind of understanding is Wilson's purpose. It is also the approach most likely to attract readers to a biography of Vuk in English. Besides his unintended accomplishment of becoming a politically potent legend, Vuk engaged in two great cultural enterprises of continuing interest: the founding of another modern literary language in Europe, and the collection and study of oral literature. Wilson is better on Vuk's work in oral literature than on his part in the delimitation of modern Serbian. But the appearance of Wilson's book coincides happily with the publication of Ruth Michaelis-Jena's *The Brothers Grimm* (London and New York, 1970), so that we now possess reliable biographies in English for the earliest Serbian and German apostles of modern European oral literary studies. As the reader of either book will learn, Vuk and Jacob Grimm were good friends and a mutual help to each other in that enterprise.

The reader will find it nearly impossible to pursue any part of the life or work beyond Wilson's exposition into Wilson's sources, even if he can read Serbo-Croatian. Wilson generously acknowledges his debt to others but rarely cites the source, and then too carelessly, no matter how important it is. He has, for example, ingeniously used as the skeleton of his own tale the only considerable extant autobiographical information about Vuk. That information comes from I. I. Sreznevsky's "Vuk Stefanovich Karadzich: Biograficheski ocherk," in *Bratskaia pomoch' postradavshim semeistvam Bosnii i Gertsegoviny* (St. Petersburg, 1876). Wilson

quotes whole paragraphs of this work in (his own?) translation, but never gives the title of either the article or the book.

Unfortunately the book is a catastrophe in the spelling of Yugoslav names, omitting diacriticals as if they meant no more than accents in Byzantine Greek. The book's absolutely consistent misspelling of the name Karadžić creates the kind of effect that a biography of Benjamin Franklin would. There is no good reason for mistreating the personal names of Yugoslavs, who possess such an admirably definite orthography—an orthography invented by the very man whose biography this book is!

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POEMS OF ENDRE ADY. Introduction and translations by *Anton N. Nyerges*.

Prepared for publication by *Joseph M. Értavy-Baráth*. State University of New York, College at Buffalo, Program in Soviet and East Central European Studies, no. 1. Buffalo: Hungarian Cultural Foundation, 1969. 491 pp.

Professor Nyerges's volume of Ady translations is so pioneering in its subject, and impressive in its scope, that an unqualifiedly negative criticism of its core contents, while often justified, may seem pedantic in the face of the very magnitude of a much-needed offering. Large books do of course have the advantage of leaving room both for high praise and for censure. The documentary portions of this volume—the long, learned introduction and the section of priceless photographs at the end—are excellent. The translating, it must be said, is uneven at best.

There are some happy moments when Nyerges's translations succeed as poetry: when he renders free rhythms ("The Lake Laughed," pp. 68–69) or Ady's curious, almost Dadaistic, repetitive technique ("My Bed Calls," p. 253), or when, obviously delighted by a particular poem, he is inspired to speak naturally and freely ("The Rainbow's Death," p. 225). It is also at such times that Ady's own shining gift for post-Symbolist innovation, his manneristic and sensitive lyric moods and tonalities, are communicated most successfully. All the more regrettable is Nyerges's frequent resort to a balladesque, archaic tone *de chez* Heine—for example, "in ancient halls and mouldy towers / the widow bachelors dance and sing" (p. 114). He also does not know when to call a halt to "shattering the myth" of Ady's untranslatability (see jacket), and in an effort to render Hungarian compounding processes he gives us neologisms that simply do not work in English (e.g., p. 219, "againrising"). Most unfortunate, even offensive, is a blatant mistranslation in a poem of mildly racist sentiment, "I Am Not a Magyar?" (p. 112), in which the Hungarian word *korcs* "birth-defective" is mistranslated as "mongrel" (the note on page 151 does not help matters much). All in all the Léda poems, some of Ady's most consistently lyric utterances, seem to fare best, even in the artistically rather naïve effort that the present offering represents.

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