

phenomenon, relying instead on biographical information about writers. (For an expanded explanation of regionalism see Hladnik (to appear).) The final approximately sixty pages bring the genre to life with examples.

Thirteen popular works are summarized (133-141), there are thirty-eight representative excerpts accompanied by illustrations (142-194), a chronology of works (125-130) and a ranking of thirty-four writers by output (in words). Ranking highest are France Bevk, Miško Kranjec, Fran Detela, Janez Jalen and Fran Jaklič (131). The book is casebound in a black cover displaying a silvery crosscut of a stump and adorned with a white marker ribbon.

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Edvard Kocbek. *Na vratih zvečer / At the Door at Evening*. Translated by Tom Ložar. Ljubljana: Aleph & Dorion, Québec: The Muses' Co./La Compagnie des Muses, 1990. 116 pp. ISBN 0-91999754-24-4.

In this beautifully-produced Slovene-English book Edvard Kocbek's enchanting poetry is for the first time brought before an English-speaking audience. The timing could not be better. With the collapse of the Berlin wall the old political divisions may have become obsolete, but the experience of totalitarian limits to the human spirit lingers on in different forms. Kocbek's poetry, as well as his biography, is a remarkable witness to and document of the modern dark ages in Yugoslavia in particular and Eastern Europe in general. A top official in the postwar Slovene government, he was—although a Christian Socialist—deeply aware of the Communist failure to live up to its utopian program. He exposed the existential dilemmas of the revolutionary vagaries of the partisan movement in a series of war memoirs and, after becoming increasingly critical of his once-dear comrades, he fell out of favor and once again turned to his first love, poetry. He had, to be sure, been at the fore of Slovene literary life before the war as well. A brilliant essayist and a highly-respected mind among non-Communist progressive intellectuals, he nevertheless is remembered best for his poetic vision. His poems, which have been aptly translated with a sensitive ear and evident passion by Tom Ložar of Montreal, testify to the human condition in revolution-torn countries better than any historical record. A writer with not only wit and clarity of style, but also substance, he is concerned with the depth of his metaphysical contemplations on the nature of compassion, suffering, and hope. His poems, which are almost epic in form but vulnerably lyrical in content, convey the sense of correspondence which places the most intimate love

relationship in its larger social and spiritual perspective with the urgency of a great master. His poetry is, however, by no means political. On the contrary: it is precisely in his subtle manipulation of images, more often than not drawn from peasant folklore, that the tragic social dynamics of his country come effortlessly to life. He is indeed a great poet in a tradition of narrative folk poetry where an account of important happenings and troublesome events is presented through a personal revelation or, at times, an inspired confession disguised as a sermon. Kocbek has of course a strong spiritual bent.

Regardless of his allegiance to Roman Catholicism, I dare say however that his more cosmological than religious longing permeates his poetry in a way not unlike the mythological consciousness in the writings of the late Vasko Popa. That is, it offers a frame of reference within which his poems become a true witness: the courage to be himself beyond all ideologies, political parties and historical projects; the courage to pursue his own sense of being at one with the world, even if it strays from the beaten path. Herein perhaps lies the reason why his poetry is considered a standard among Slovene *literati*, a poetry to be emulated and struggled with, but whose esthetic and metaphysical power is never seriously called into question. His dark sentiments of melancholy, depression and nostalgia for the time when man was not a stranger in paradise do not prevent him from keeping in sight a commitment to the harmony of the individual and the world, even if this commitment becomes directed against the dominant mode. It is this rebellious and deeply intimate writing that has made Kocbek a poet of "extraordinary originality and vision who deserves a place in the pantheon of modern literature," as Charles Simic points out in his preface to this collection (5). Kocbek's poetry is a moving account of the times when limitations of all kinds reigned supreme because its departure-point is the conviction that, for poetic liberty to tell the story of the world as it was, as it is, and as it always will be, there are no limitations.

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Jože Pogačnik, *Twentieth century Slovene literature*, translated by Anne Čeh. Ljubljana, Milan Simčič. [= *le livre slovène*, no.1, 1989]. 189 pp.

The current upheaval in Yugoslavia, and the political disintegration of this country as we have known it, constitutes a vivid explanatory background for the kind of book written by the well-known historian of Slovene literature, Jože Pogačnik. It reflects on the part of the nations which constituted the Yugoslav federation an ardent desire to assert their cultural identity. This intention is clearly formulated in the opening sentence of Pogačnik's introduction: "Every national literature — he declares — ceaselessly endeavours to shape what is today designated by the modern and fashionable concept of *identity*." Indeed, the advantages of this tendency are obvious. To date, various literary developments of ethnic character have been lumped together as one under the common term of "Yugoslav literature." In this sort of generalization or presentation, smaller literatures