

documentary novel, was first written in English for their sake, to tell them who their father was before they were born. Doubtless they knew already how extraordinary he was, but they must have been pleased to see the story in print now in this strange language, not Mexican, in which Charlie sometimes used to sing songs that nobody could understand. As a bonus, the book gives us the stories told by Eskimo Charlie and then cited by a *Toronto Star* reporter.

This is a great book to browse in. Another book in that tradition that says, "This guy was one of us," that process which we sometimes, with the best intentions, carry too far into distant generations. It is pretty clear Eskimo Charlie was a Slovene; on the other hand, these astronauts and congressmen? Finally, the book is interesting because in its mixing of genres, in its attempt to tell so many stories, in its effort to say all, it approaches poetry and tells us something beyond the story. Perhaps it is poetry because in a way it is also a book about Cvetka Kocjančič, not just in her search for Planinshek but also in her search for herself. We do not hesitate to call primitive painters such as Rousseau or Generalič just that: it is clearly understood as a compliment. Well, Kocjančič is a primitive writer; thank God she does not care about breaking the rules. What turns this into a poetic work is precisely its use of all the tools at hand—photographs, letters, maps, articles, songs, chronologies and the author's own energy and love—nay, obsessions, and doggedness and skill—for a portrait of one-of-a-kind Charlie. It seems to me that Kocjančič is as difficult to categorize as Charlie was; she tries to do as many things in her work as Charlie Planinshek did in his. *Gospodar*, incidentally, deserved better proof-reading, but we have all had this experience in Slovenia.

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Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*. London: Penguin; BBC Books, 1995. 400 pp., \$29.95 (paper). *Smrt Jugoslavije*, translated by Barbara and Marjan Sedmak and Nada Pantić-Starič. Ljubljana: Co Libri, 1996. 384 pp. (paper).

The Death of Yugoslavia is the result of personal experience; it is an eyewitness account of the numerous phases of Yugoslavia's destruction. But it is also based on interviews, written and published records. Silber,

the Balkans correspondent for the *Financial Times*, and Little, a BBC journalist since 1988, published their book to accompany the five-hour BBC series of the same title, which was first broadcast in the autumn of 1996 (and somewhat later in Slovenia). The authors wanted to tell their readers—and succeed in doing so—that Yugoslavia did not fall apart as a result of various nationalisms but because certain “actors” in this true-to-life drama had carefully prepared a plan to split apart the country and gain territories for Serbs living outside of Serbia.

Silber and Little have divided their book into four parts. The first one, entitled “Laying the Charge,” comprises six chapters and deals with the events prior to Slovenia’s “phoney war,” as they call it, in June–July 1991. In doing so, they reach back into history, discussing historical milestones such as Tito’s death in 1981 and even earlier ones. From the perspective of a Slovene reader, the book’s first highlight is chapter 3, “No Way Back,” which describes and analyzes the Slovene Spring of 1988. Not only are the authors well informed, but they also see and interpret events the way most Slovenes believe them to have been. Despite their matter-of-fact, professional tone, Silber and Little exude a deep sympathy for Slovenia’s “period of liberalism, unprecedented in the Communist world” (49). They do their best to see and interpret the Slovene “uprising” from both sides—the official, government (with its apparent dismissal of the importance of the new political groups and their activities) as well as the opposition. The authors very dramatically present the political affair involving the Ljubljana Four, which escalated into an open “war” with the Yugoslav army—the latter “acting like a bull in a china shop” (58). The section concludes with a quotation from one of the accused, Zavrl: “In early 1989, I and most others would still have opted for Yugoslavia . . . But then began Milošević’s attacks in Kosovo, the attacks on Slovenes in the army, and the whole irrational pressure from Serbia and Milošević. It drove us out much faster” (59).

Part 2 bears a meaningful title, “Lighting the Fuse.” It begins with a reportorial presentation of the rebellion of Serbs in the Srbska Krajina (Knin) between January and August 1990, then proceeds to the arming of Slovenia and Croatia in the period between April 1990 and January 1991, and the slow but certain descent into war, a time the writer of these lines remembers all too well as the time of escalating Serbian threats in every walk of life. Silber and Little also speak openly

about the inefficient U.S. policy on secession as "neither one thing nor the other" (165).

Part 3, "The Explosion of War," begins with chapter 12, entitled "The Hour of Europe Has Dawned; Slovenia's Phoney War, June–July 1991," which opens with Slovenia's declaration of independence on the evening of 25 June 1991. In precise detail the authors unveil the steps taken by the Yugoslav army authorities and the prime minister in order to "safeguard the state frontiers at the border-crossings" (170), as the official decree of enforcement was carefully phrased. Silber and Little speak about two operative plans, plan A, the milder version, and plan B, the stricter one that was never implemented. The climax of this chapter is the dramatic description of the meeting of the Slovene leadership in the wee hours of 27 June that lasted only a few minutes but at which a decision was made to seize the historic opportunity for independence and defend Slovene sovereignty. The authors further expose the war as the challenge Europe needed, after America's withdrawal, "to prove its singleness of purpose" (175). Another highlight of this chapter is the authors' statement that "Slovenia's war . . . was crucially different from the two that followed it, in Croatia and Bosnia. It was not a war between Serbs and Slovenes, but rather a war between Slovenes and a federal system . . ." (183). No doubt, though, many Slovenes still perceive the federal system and the Serbians as one and the same. The only really objectionable thing in this chapter seems to be its title: from a present perspective, after much graver events in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, the war in Slovenia appears less mortally dangerous, but to all of us who waited in air-raid shelters for the federal army bombs to drop on our homes it certainly was not "phoney" but very real.

What comes after chapter 12 is first the undeclared and dirty war in Croatia and then, in part 3, the longest in the book, the war in Bosnia, recorded step by step in its bloodiest detail, the Dayton agreement not yet concluded. The Slovene version of the book, however, has an appendix following the final chapter, entitled "Vse poti vodijo v Dayton" (All roads lead to Dayton), which includes a

chronological survey of the events in Bosnia during the second half of 1995.¹

In the final section of the original, however, entitled "Acknowledgements," Silber and Little tell us that "to work in the former Yugoslavia is to enter a world of parallel truths" (390). And they conclude by stating, "Any errors of judgement this book contains . . . are, of course, our own" (311). The writer of this review is not a historian and would rather refrain from judging the historical accuracy of the book. Nonetheless, as a reader and observer, I find it both an exciting and terrifying excursion into the not-so-distant past. The chapter on Bosnia is both shocking and depressing as the reader realizes that the worst nightmares of history can and do repeat themselves. For a resident of the former Yugoslavia this well-written work is bound to recall very vividly perhaps suppressed but not forgotten memories. For a foreigner, it may be a shocking revelation.

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Aleš Debeljak, *Twilight of the Idols: Recollections of a Lost Yugoslavia*. Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1994. Translated by Michael Biggins. Photographs by Elizabeth Rappaport. 85 pp., \$10 (paper).

----- *Somrak idolov*. Klagenfurt: Wieser, 1994. 45 pp. (paper).

Mercifully, in North America our deepest suffering during the break-up of Yugoslavia was listening to experts who knew too little. They still confuse the players because they do not have a program (and foreign names are too difficult), but they often have an agenda. The favorite cliché (at one forum Pierre Trudeau and Mikhail Gorbachev agreed on it) is the one about ancient hatreds as a result of which nothing can be done. Oh yes, and everybody is equally guilty. To these and others I recommend Aleš Debeljak's moving and intelligent account of what happened in Yugoslavia.

¹ Later editions by Laura Silber and Allan Little are: *The Death of Yugoslavia*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin; BBC Books, 1996). *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997).