

REVIEWS

Nikolai Mikhailov. *Frühslovenische Sprachdenkmäler. Die Handschriftliche Periode der slowenischen Sprache (XIV. Jh. bis 1550).* Studies in Slavic and General Linguistics. 26. Ed. A.A. Barentsen, B.M. Groen, J. Schaeken, and R. Sprenger. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions RODOPI B.V., 1998. 449 pp. + illustrations 1–15, \$111.00 (cloth)

The professed objective of Nikolai Mikhailov's volume is "a renewed publication and a historical linguistic analysis of nine early Slovene written texts of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries," recorded between the *Brižinski spomeniki* (the end of the tenth, beginning of the eleventh century) and the first Slovene printed book, Primož Trubar's *Catechismus* (1550): the *Celovški/Rateški rokopis*, the *Stiški rokopis*, the *Kranjski rokopis*, the *Videmski rokopis*, the *Škofjeloški rokopis*, the *Starogorski rokopis*, the *Černjejski rokopis*, the *Auerspergov rokopis*, and the *Homilieskizze (Načrt za pridigo, ca. 1450)*.

The proposition of Mikhailov's introduction makes it very clear that the role of early Slovene manuscripts between the *Brižinski spomeniki* and Trubar's publications has been greatly undervalued by Slovenists in Slovenia. The existence of such manuscripts in the "centuries without literary tradition" was interpreted as an accident, though their independent existence in the Slovene cultural tradition should argue just the opposite.

The thesis of Nikolai Mikhailov's essay is: A renewed publication of the early Slovene manuscripts and their analysis is one of

the *Frühslovenische Sprachdenkmäler*'s scholar's most important, though by far not the last, tasks he proposes to accomplish.

The first chapter of Mikhailov's book presents the most important information on the "History of Scholarly Work on Early Slovene Manuscripts"; the second chapter is on the "Early Slovene Monuments, Texts, and Commentaries"—his analysis of concrete individual manuscripts with bibliographic and linguistic commentary; the third chapter is a summational *Schlusswort*, with his scholarly propositions, bibliography, index of words, and expressions in the manuscript, list of names of scholars referred to in the discussion, and a series of illustrations (*Abbildungen*) at the end of the book—with the reproductions from the *Celovški/Rateški, Stiški, Kranjski, Videmski, Škofjeloški, Starogorski, Černjejski, Auerspergov rokopis*, and the *Homilie-skizze*, a recently (in September 1997) discovered text of a *Načrt za pridigo* in the Nadškofijski arhiv in Ljubljana, which Milko Kos dates according to the writing to ca. 1450 (371).

Mikhailov's *Schlusswort* also outlines two aspects of the problems that, in his judgment, reflect the contributions of research on the "Handschriftenperiode" of Slovene literature to this time. From the historical point of view, the role of the Slovene language in the Slovene Middle Ages in Koroško, Slovenska Benečija, Kranjsko, and Notranjsko vs. Prekmurje, Dolenjsko, and Bela Krajina should again be researched and characterized. From the linguistic point of view, the "Slovenität" of the early Slovene linguistic monuments and of the propensity towards creation of a Slovene standard literary *language tends to be distinct and clear* (emphasis mine - R.L.).

A list of questions in reference to the history and evolution of the Slovene language is posited in the very last paragraph of Mikhailov's essay—in relation to a few more or less concrete phonetic, accentual, and morphological features of Slovene (e.g., vowel reduction, accent shifts, the evolution of the pattern of the dual).

The *Literaturverzeichnis* at the end of the volume includes a carefully selected inventory of the most important traditional—and most recent bibliography of—Slovene scholarship on Slovene language.

The author's acknowledgment (*Danksagung*) at the very beginning of the volume tells us that his book was prepared in mid-1996 and the beginning of 1998, and that without the professional and moral

assistance of a number of his teachers, friends, and colleagues (Milko Matičetov in Ljubljana, Sergio Bonazza in Verona, Pavle Merku, and Marija Pirjevec in Trieste, Mark K. Greenberg at the University of Kansas—to mention but a few—his work would never have been completed.

In summary, Nikolai Mikhailov's *Frühslovenische Sprachdenkmäler* is an excellent international resource on the early Slovene manuscripts, their analysis, and their bibliographic documentation.

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Aleš Debeljak, ed. *The Imagination of Terra Incognita: Slovenian Writing 1945–1995*. Fredonia, NY: White Pine, 1997. 468 pp., \$20.00 (paper).

A back cover blurb says this book is "an essential resource for anyone interested in the power of literary insight and historical experience." I may be the wrong reviewer. All I'm after is truth's twin, beauty. Or I may be just the one to ask what, indeed, Slovenes can peddle.

Archbishop Rode, for instance, says Cankar "never reached world-class standards, the way Tolstoy and Dostoevsky can" because his concerns "were not material for world-class literature" (46). Actually, Cankar never made it because he wrote in Slovenian. To believe the "what" makes a writer is to say Frost isn't much because he writes of farmers. Indeed, *The Imagination of Terra Incognita* does not work because it follows too closely this view that only important themes need apply.

First, about language. Here is an excerpt from the acknowledgments: "This anthology could have not seen the light of day had it not been for the unflagging support and courageous, enthusiastic, and underpaid assistance of several persons ... , a transplanted New York editor, who settled in Slovenian capital city ..." (14). We could debate whether "could have not seen" is English, but there is nothing