

CZECH LITERATURE. By *Arne Novák*. Translated from the Czech by *Peter Kussi*. Edited and with a supplement by *William E. Harkins*. The Joint Committee on Eastern Europe Publication Series, no. 4. Published under the auspices of the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe, American Council of Learned Societies. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976. x, 375 pp.

When the Czechoslovak state appeared on the map of Europe sixty years ago, few Westerners had any knowledge of its history, geography, literature, and culture. Although an impressive amount of scholarly work on Czechoslovakia has been published in Western languages since then, a gulf of ignorance still separates the Czechs from the Western world to which Czechs nevertheless feel they belong. The Czech language is difficult to learn and to translate; peculiarities of historical development and introversion of Czech literature increase the difficulties of understanding. Cultural isolation and political ostracism of Czechoslovakia by the West go together. The question can thus be posed: If there had been a Czech Shakespeare, could Neville Chamberlain as easily have dismissed the Czechs as "a people about whom we know nothing," and would Franklin Delano Roosevelt have been as ready to consign them into the orbit of "fellow Slavs, the Russians"?

Those who want to learn about the cultural soul of the Czechs will welcome this book, published under the auspices of the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe of the American Council of Learned Societies. It is composed of selections from several histories of Czech literature by Arne Novák and presents a study of Czech literature in its European context, searching out causes of isolation and points of contact. Arne Novák (1880–1939), together with František Xavier Šalda, was the founder of Czech literary history and criticism, and was dedicated to the aesthetic evaluation of literary works from the perspective of historical national traditions. His knowledge of Czech and European literatures and his ability to characterize cultural developments, literary trends, and individual works enabled him to give foreign readers insight into the special nature of Czech literary life. His study, first published in 1932, was updated by Antonin Grund of Masaryk University in Brno, and more recently, by William E. Harkins of Columbia University, who added a summary of literary history from 1946 to the present. All important works of Czech literature, from the ninth century to 1974, are included, even those written by authors in exile. An index of authors and a roster of English equivalents of Czech sounds enhance the usefulness of the volume.

The main thesis of Novák's book is that, although Czech is the oldest of Slavic literatures, few works have received recognition outside of Czechoslovakia, and those works that have, are recognized through the strength of their ideas, not artistic qualities. One reason, he maintains, is that lyricism (the favorite form of Czech authors) reaches the world maimed by translation, as "butterflies shorn of color" (p. 2). But there are more fundamental reasons for this lack of artistic qualities. The Czechs have been a nation without a state for many centuries: literature was the mirror of national life, the printed word its life line. Literature had to serve the immediate goals of the nation, not universal principles of art. When the Renaissance and humanism were sweeping educated Europe, Czech Hussites and their successors, the Brethren, turned to a blend of puritanical religion and radical nationalism which was hostile to art. Later, Czech nationalism replaced religion. From contemporary European thought—German romanticism and French revolutionary ideology—Czech provincial utilitarianism adopted only those ideas which enhanced national self-confidence.

The most outstanding accomplishments were reached in historiography: the work of the old chroniclers of the early Middle Ages and the histories written in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Even when Czech cultural life seemed virtually extinguished, with Latin or German as the literary language, historians remained true to national traditions and passed them on to František Palacký, the

historian who forged the past into a tool of Czech national revival and into a divining rod of the nation's future: *historia magistra vitae*.

Although they fought for the right of self-determination and self-expression, Czech poets did not translate their national aspirations into expressions of universal humanity; consequently their works remain largely unknown. This volume evaluates Czech literature and its traditions, marks the impact of foreign influences, and analyzes the artistic and social roots of individual authors. It is a reliable guide to the spiritual climate of the country, and an excellent example of the high standards of pre-World War II Czech literary scholarship.

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MODERN SLAVIC LITERATURES, vol. 2: BULGARIAN, CZECHOSLOVAK, POLISH, UKRAINIAN, AND YUGOSLAV LITERATURES. Compiled and edited by Vasa D. Mihailovich et al. A Library of Literary Criticism. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1976. xvi, 720 pp. \$30.00.

This is the second volume of a series devoted to literary criticism of twentieth-century Slavic literatures; the first volume, edited by Vasa D. Mihailovich, and devoted exclusively to Russian literature, was published in 1972. Entries are arranged alphabetically by literature (Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, Polish, Ukrainian, and Yugoslav literatures are included), and within each literature alphabetically by author. The entries themselves consist of excerpts taken from reviews, critical articles, and introductions to works of literature themselves. Most of the entries are from the national literature (translated into English), but quite a few are drawn from English-language sources and a very few are taken from Western European sources (also translated into English). Editors for the various sections include Thomas Butler (Bulgarian), Igor Hájek (Czechoslovak), Zbigniew Folejewski and Bogdan Czaykowski (Polish), Leo D. Rudnytzky (Ukrainian), and Vasa D. Mihailovich (Yugoslav). A preface conveys the editors' regret for failing to include Belorussian literature, an omission they attribute to lack of availability of suitable critical material.

The present volume contains no statement of purpose, but the companion first volume states that it is intended "as a reference tool for students, scholars, librarians and researchers—the first such compendium on Russian literature in any language. It is also hoped that the general reader . . . will find both a satisfaction of curiosity and a desire to pursue further individual writers and critics." (Presumably the word "further" belongs at the close of this sentence.) This is an expression of pious hope, but still the present reviewers must question the purpose of the volume. No doubt it is well executed, the selection of writers for inclusion is generally good, and the choice of critics to be excerpted, while sometimes rather limited, is quite acceptable. The series itself is a respectable and successful one, with companion volumes for American, British, German, French, and Latin American literatures. But the real purpose of this book is singularly unclear. The reader is given no systematic information concerning the writers included (other than that which he can glean casually or reconstruct from the critical excerpts); the excerpts themselves are sometimes condensed almost to the point of unintelligibility, and at times the opinions of the individual critics tend to cancel each other out, so that the final impression is extremely confused. A scholar can cope with all this, no doubt, but would a real scholar wish to satisfy himself with excerpts? It is also hard to see how a librarian could use the book, except as an indication of which works and authors are worth buying (and this can be gained from several literary dictionaries currently in print which deal with many of the same writers). Heaven help the untutored student who attempts to use the book, especially if he should try to base a paper on its contents! Finally, the scholar hardly needs such