

***The Slavic Epic: Gundulic's Osman.* By Zdenko Zlatar. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995. Pp. xxx + 599, acknowledgments, list of illustrations, list of maps, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-8204-2380-7 cloth.)**

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communicative and aesthetic problems that need to be resolved. In Jeannie Robertson's case, family upheavals, the increasing integration of travellers into mainstream Scots society, her discovery and promotion as a folk revival artist, are shown to be the primary social catalysts, but of equal significance are her awareness of her own talent and her sensitivity to the demands of performance. These too push her in new directions.

More than just a biography and song collection, *Jeannie Robertson: Emergent Singer, Transformative Voice* reveals an artist sensitive to her place within tradition and her varying roles as a performer, from community singer to revival star. I not only recommend the book, but suggest it as required reading for anyone interested in folksong and particularly for those interested in the impact of the revival on traditional singers. If the work has weaknesses, most can be traced to the necessity of compressing a vast amount of material into a single volume; at the same time, there are few other works on individual singers that offer such comprehensiveness with respect to biography, repertoire, and analysis.

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*The Slavic Epic* is a lengthy, detailed discussion of the seventeenth-century Croatian poet Ivan (Djivo) Gundulić and his best-known work, the literary epic *Osman*. *Osman*, a poem that Gundulić never completed, is a

narrative drawn from the 1621 Battle of Hoczym that relates the defeat of the Sultan Osman as he struggles against Slavic (Polish) rebels led by King Wladyslaw during the ascendancy of the Ottoman Empire. Zlatar suggests that the poem portrays most importantly Gundulić's own aspirations for Slavic liberation from foreign domination, and that "Gundulić's final vision" (p. 460) is expressed in the pan-Slavism that pervades *Osman*. He ultimately argues that "*Osman*, imperfect and incomplete as it is, is the greatest epic... ever written by a Slav" (p. 451). Zlatar's convictions on this score are not persuasive.

In the Preface, Zlatar poses the following question: "Why a book on Gundulić's epic *Osman*?" (p. xv). Indeed, any number of reasons might justify a monograph on a literary work as important as *Osman*. But the justifications Zlatar provides for writing this book are disappointing. He answers his own question by providing a series of quotes from various dictionaries of literature and encyclopedias which extol the merits of the epic. The 600-page book effectively becomes an attempt — from a broad array of perspectives — to rehabilitate an author who was widely appreciated in the nineteenth century but who has been frequently denigrated during the twentieth century mainly on aesthetic grounds.

*The Slavic Epic* is symmetrically divided into three major parts, each of which contains three chapters. Part One ("The Making of a Poet") presents an elaborate historical account of Dubrovnik (apparently a backdrop for understanding Gundulić and his poetry), followed by a lengthy discussion of Gundulić's other major works besides *Osman*. Zlatar also treats Gundulić in a comparative light, underscoring especially his well-known emulation of the verse and creative philosophy of Torquato Tasso, the great poet of the Italian Renaissance.

Part Two ("The Slavic Epic in the Making") begins with an evaluation of historical accuracy in *Osman*. Zlatar (unlike some other critics) argues that Gundulić was indeed very knowledgeable about both Ottoman and Polish history. He maintains that when history in *Osman* appears excessively embellished, it simply reflects Gundulić's adherence to Tasso's approach to the role of history in epic, namely that poetic license and aesthetics determine its rendering. The influence of Petrarchian lyric on Gundulić and other Dalmatian poets as well as Gundulić's later inspiration from Dante are also pursued here. Possibly of greater interest for readers of this journal is Zlatar's treatment of oral tradition (especially epic and myth) in relation to the poem, though the interface between *Osman* and oral literature never really becomes a compelling

issue. Disturbing in this section is Zlatar's insistence on passing judgement on topics relating to oral literature in superlatives. For example, he confidently states that "what shaped [the early South Slavic epic] oral tradition most of all was the feudal, courtly notion of love and fealty" (p. 206). This is an echo of a suggestion made by Nikola Banašević in the 1920s, but it places undue importance on the influence of the Old French *chansons de geste* on an oral poetry that drew primarily from its own traditional heroic culture, extending back into a distant Balkan past. In Zlatar's discourse on myth, important questions of symbolism are raised, particularly in connection with the dragon and eagle which figure so prominently in the epic. Examples such as from Bogomil myths of creation are exploited in the interpretation that *Osman* essentially narrates a cosmic struggle between the forces of Good and Evil, with strong dualistic implications. This is picked up again in Part Three ("The Wheel of Fortune"), where Zlatar situates the wheel of fortune in dualistic philosophy (especially Zoroastrianism). He then relates this to Gundulić's world view: his animosity toward Islam as opposed to his veneration of Christendom and leaders of Christian "nations."

Despite the integrity of *Osman*, it is an unfinished epic. The work was to include twenty cantos, but Gundulić left two unwritten. Scholars have long debated the reasons for this omission. Zlatar also takes on the subject, suggesting that Gundulić refused to finish the epic "because the expected turn of events never materialized:... the Ottoman Empire was not destroyed... during Gundulić's lifetime" (pp. 370-71). He examines the Croatian Romantic poet and pan-Slavist, Ivan Mažuranić, who painstakingly composed the missing cantos in 1844. Zlatar also discusses the scholarly reception of Gundulić during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the poet was alternately glorified and repudiated. Aiming to redress the negative reputation of Gundulić particularly in the twentieth century, Zlatar concludes the book by arguing for the "greatness" of Gundulić, especially in his vision of pan-Slavism as expressed in *Osman*: "Gundulić's greatness lies in his... capturing of the profound longing of the South Slavs to be free.... [He] thus provided... a vision of Slavs achieving their own liberation by themselves" (pp. 461, 462). Such a vision, however, seems strangely out of place in the context of today's Balkans.

Zlatar is exceedingly well-read, not only in Gundulić and general Croatian literature, but also in the broad range of epic scholarship ranging from Homer, to Tasso, to twentieth century heroic poetry (much about which he has written already). His reading on the whole is insightful and at times

novel, but there is much repetition of argument, lengthy paraphrasing of other viewpoints, many long quotes, and endless digressions. Despite the length and redundancy of the volume, Zlatar's treatment is truly an *Osmanophile's* dream — a relentlessly thorough analysis of the major issues surrounding the epic on a wide variety of planes written by a scholar passionately immersed in his topic.

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***Eye on the Future: Popular Culture Scholarship into the 21st Century in Honor of Ray B. Browne.*** By Marilyn F. Motz, John G. Nachbar, Michael T. Marsden, and Ronald J. Ambrosetti. (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994. 294 p., ISBN: 0-8797-2655-5, \$39.95 U.S.)

Ray Brown, a founder of popular culture studies in America, retired from his academic post as Chair of the Popular Culture Department at Bowling Green State University in 1992. In June of that year a group of his friends and colleagues from across the country gathered to honor him. At Browne's request, the focus of the conference was not to look back at his accomplishments but rather to look to the future of popular culture studies. *Eye on the Future: Popular Culture Scholarship into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Honor of Ray B. Browne*, edited by Marilyn Motz, John Nachbar, and Ray Ambrosetti, includes twelve articles developed from the presentations at that conference, along with a collection of Browne's favorite essays from throughout his career. Taken together, the writings in this volume address key issues in popular culture, including its definition, method of study, aesthetics, and role in people's lives.

At the core of the book is the realization that popular culture study, like Browne's prolific career, has triggered controversy. As Michael T. Marsden writes in the book's preface, Browne, with his belief in inclusion, has redefined the study of human culture, "utiliz[ing] the opposition to strengthen the importance of academic explorations at the margins," and his "iconoclastic professional life has inspired many others to forsake the safe centre of established wisdom." In so doing, Browne not only has engineered a new discipline but also has demonstrated the unmistakable impact of popular culture studies on other disciplines.