It took the novel a long time to develop as a genre in Yugoslav literature. While poetry, short story, and drama established themselves at one time or another in the nineteenth century, the novel did not become a full-fledged member of the literary family until the end of that century. Even then, it was a rather weak genre. Poetry and storytelling had their roots in folk literature; the novel had no tradition or sources to draw from. Between the two world wars it acquired greater respectability, mainly through the works of Miroslav Krleža, Rastko Petrović, and Milos Crnjanski, but it was not until after the last war that the novel attained full stature. Today it is considered the strongest and the most important genre in all Yugoslav literature.

Yugoslav literature since 1945 shows continuity from the period between the wars, although there are interesting new phenomena. The high achievements of the novel belong to these new phenomena. To be sure, the first postwar novels were similar to those written earlier. When we add to this the emergence of socialist realism, which initiated to a large degree the model of Soviet literature, the nature of the new novels becomes clear. Symptomatically, very few good ones were written in this initial period. Fortunately, socialist realism in Yugoslav arts lasted only a few years. Encouraged by the political break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslav writers strove to free themselves from the limitations of socialist realism. It is significant that such novels as Far Away Is the Sun (Daleko je sunce) by Dobrica Ćosić and The Poem (Pesma) by Oskar Daviço played an important role in this struggle, being the harbingers of the things to come. By the mid-1950's the ban was broken and the road for new writers was paved. In the 1960's, a totally new generation of novelists entered the scene with bold new approaches and a passion for experimentation. As a consequence, the Yugoslav novel of today resembles little its forerunners of the 1940's and the early 1950's.

The Serbian postwar novel developed under circumstances identical to those in other Yugoslav literatures. The best way to gauge its steady rise and transformation is to discuss its achievements. The purpose of this article is to chart chronologically these achievements. To be sure, such a simplified method is not without risks and dangers. For example, two magnificent novels by Ivo Andrić, The Bridge on the Drina (Na Drini čuprija) and The Chronicle of Travnik (Travnička kronika), appeared almost before contemporary Yugoslav literature began. Yet they must be considered an integral part of the contemporary Serbian novel, linking, as it were, the past with the present. Indeed, one could not ask for a more auspicious beginning.

The first of these, The Bridge on the Drina (1945), has already attained the label of a classic. A novel of truly epic proportions, it spans centuries—from the early sixteenth century to the beginning of World War One—treating some of the most fateful events in Yugoslav history. It also comes closest to the folk epic, for which Yugoslav literature is well known. Many generations of Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians of Orthodox, Catholic, Moslem, and Jewish faith are portrayed here rolling like small stones in the river bed of history, at times peacefully, but
more often caught in the turbulent storms so typical of the Balkans. Strife and misunderstanding overshadow the relatively few peaceful moments in the lives of these generations. To add insult to the injuries inflicted by foreign invaders, the closely related people who inhabit the banks of the Drina were sometimes at each other's throats. Hence the symbolism of the novel's main metaphor, indeed its main significance—the bridge as a link between the shores, a connection between the East and the West. In Andric's words, "Life is an incomprehensible miracle because it is constantly being consumed and eroded and yet it lasts and stands firmly like the bridge on the Drina." The bridge is likened to life and that is exactly what it has been for the people living around it for centuries: a symbol of life and lasting values. Therefore, it is not surprising that the bridge emerges as the main "character" in this novel, in a figurative sense, of course.

*The Bridge on the Drina* is not a novel in the real sense; it is more of a chronicle. There are no main characters. To say that there is a unifying plot would be to stretch the imagination, for many episodes in the course of years, even centuries, are connected only through the presence of the bridge. This prompts me to think that the author uses the novel as a historical laboratory in order to show that these closely related nationalities survived the turbulent storms not only because they possessed the strong will for survival, but also because the hand of providence, in the person of a Janissary son of these shores, the Great Vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolovic, had given them a symbol of the indestructibility of life and a steady reminder for the need of unity. For other areas of the world there are different objects that serve this purpose; for the Balkans it is the bridge. Andric has created a myth. The bridge on the Drina itself attains the significance of a national shrine. At the same time, it is the most meaningful—and beautiful—metaphor in all Yugoslav literature.

Andric retains the nature of a chronicle in his second novel, *The Chronicle of Travnik* (1945), which is translated both as *The Bosnian Story* and as *The Bosnian Chronicle.* Of less epic dimensions than *The Bridge on the Drina,* it is nevertheless just as majestic and profound. Many critics consider it Andric's best work. It is a more traditional novel; it has a defined time span (the beginning of the nineteenth century), distinct characters, and an interaction between them which resembles a definite plot. Andric again uses a novel as a historical laboratory, this time bringing to the scene another European power, Napoleon's Empire. The truth he wants to prove here is that of the impossibility of a historical transplantation. Just as a body rejects a foreign tissue, so does a nation reject a foreign imposition, no matter how well-intended it may be. The diplomatic games of the consuls of France, Austro-Hungary, and Turkey, who constantly try to outwit each other, are only ripples on the surface of the sea. Deep beneath the surface lies the unpredictable captive populace observing passively the incomprehensible games of the foreign invaders and waiting for its hour. As in most of his works, Andric uses fiction to expound his philosophical views and ethical values. This quality lends his novel depth, wisdom, and universal appeal; and these eventually brought him the Nobel Prize in 1961.

The first significant postwar novel, *Far Away is the Sun* (1951), was written by a then unknown writer and a former partisan, Dobrica Cosic. Although based on true events and largely autobiographical, *Far Away Is the Sun* is a skillfully written war novel, with a fast moving action, believable happenings, and well-developed characters. It had a refreshing effect after several abortive attempts at writing war fiction in the manner of socialist realism. Its refreshing quality is found in a much greater objectivity almost completely devoid of putrifying black-and-white characterization. To be sure, the partisan struggle is still glorified, although only implicitly; the leading characters display at times
familiar superhuman efforts and an instinctive ability to separate right from wrong; and the enemy is, for the most part, all evil. But there is in this novel a willingness to admit that the heroes might sometimes be wrong after all—an attitude absent earlier. This is best illustrated by the interesting possibility that all four parties involved in the climactic decision in the novel, when the survival of the partisan unit is at stake, can be both right and wrong. When we add to this the low key, the traditional realistic manner in which the novel is written, and the undeniable stamp of originality (there are, however, reminiscences of Fadeyev’s *The Rout* and Ostrovsky’s *How the Steel Was Tempered*), we can understand why *Far Away Is the Sun* is still a very popular novel—almost a classic. Ćosić will surpass himself later, but somehow this novel remains one of those unusual works whose success defies an easy explanation, especially when we consider what it has meant in the struggle against socialist realism—namely, it was the first shot in that struggle and the signal of the forthcoming victory. Thus, the victory at the end of the novel has a double meaning.

Soon after Ćosić’s work, there appeared another novel with much the same effect. *The Poem* (1952), written by Oskar Davićo, a seasoned writer and a veteran of the literary wars of the 1930’s, is also concerned with the revolution, but on a different level. The struggle is transferred to the occupied capital city, and almost all the protagonists are intellectuals. Further differences are to be found in the nontraditional style, in the author’s propensity for psychology and profuse verbosity, and in the liberal dose of sex. It is a novel about a high school youth who, as a member of the Communist youth organization, burns with a desire to contribute to the underground war against the occupiers. Strangely enough, he finds his greatest obstacle in a compatriot, a famous elderly poet, who vacillates in his decision to join the underground. The young man accuses him of being fuzzy-minded, indecisive, and most important, lecherous—weaknesses highly detrimental to the struggle. The poet and the youth, who are actually father and son although the boy does not know it, are also involved in a love affair with the same young woman. All this would make for a highly exciting reading were it not for the author’s heavy style, endless psychologizing, repetitions, and a modified stream-of-consciousness technique. Nevertheless, Davićo offers indirect analyses of the meaning of “the struggle for liberation”; of the cultural climate of the period; of the psyche of an older artist and intellectual; and, above all, of the awakening of a young man as a revolutionary. These aspects, together with a certain ebullience, which Davićo has never surpassed since, lend *The Poem* charm and the significance of an outstanding novel.

A short novel, *The Story of the Strange Whale, Also Known as Big Mac* (*Veliki Mak*, 1956) by Erih Koš, is interesting not only as one of the few genuinely satirical novels in contemporary Yugoslav literature, but also because of the diverse interpretations of it which are possible. The story itself is reminiscent of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* in the sense that an unusual event and an outside intruder cause great commotion, setting off new thinking and new attitudes among the populace experiencing the event. In Koš’s novel, a whale is caught on the Adriatic coast. As an extreme rarity, the whale is transported from one city to another until it arrives in the capital, where it is placed on permanent display. At first the curious visitors flock by the thousands to see the monster. Curiosity soon gives way to apathy, and even boredom. But then the huge dead body begins to rot, sending waves of foul smell throughout the city. The narrator, who has steadfastly refused to succumb to the mass psychosis and who has predicted the consequences all along, finds scant pleasure in being vindicated by the event. The novel ends on an indecisive note: the carcass is cleared away by the volunteer street cleaners, but the aftereffects of this extraordinary event upon the people are left somewhat in the dark.
There is obviously an allegory here, but its interpretation depends on the reader's point of view. A politically inclined reader may interpret the story as a political satire on the system. The whale is seen symbolizing either the heavy, cumbersome regime that is beginning to putrefy, or its leader himself. A philosophically disposed reader may discuss the relationship between appearance and reality, and the problem of the illusory nature of concrete reality. And a reader who tends to interpret things on moral grounds may see in Koš's allegory a satire on the morals of people in general, on their curiosity, easy excitability, mass psychosis, on their unwillingness or perhaps their inability to reason and to analyze, and finally, on the fickleness of loyalty in the face of adversity. I am inclined toward the moral interpretation, on account of the author's past and his beliefs. It is through such universal moral application that Koš's works appeal to the readers both in his country and abroad.

The Wailing Mountain (Lelejska gora, 1959, 1962) by Mihailo Lalić is perhaps the best Serbian novel next to Andric's two major works. It describes the trials and tribulations of a young partisan leader in Montenegro during the last war; cut off from his comrades and surrounded by the enemy, he is forced to improvise in order to survive. The author uses this purely existentialist setting to probe into the mind and soul of the main character. Lalić is concerned as much with the reactions of his hero to everyday situations as he is with actual happenings in the war. This skillful blend of realistic, often naturalistic, descriptions with psychological illuminations, achieved through dreams, hallucinations, and reminiscences, gives the novel immediacy and a deeper significance rivalled by few other novels. More importantly, the hero is not always presented in the most favorable light. Stripped of the last veneer of civilization, he reaches, toward the end of the novel, that primordial stage where the only remaining concern is for one's own naked self.

Thus The Wailing Mountain turns from a war story into a profound parable about a man who finds his way to himself through a series of soul-searching encounters with friends and foes. It is interesting that Lalić wrote a second version of this novel, in which he played down the external framework of a war story and emphasized the existentialist aspect instead. As a consequence, the novel gained greatly in meaning and appeal, to the point of becoming a universal story of a man trying to unravel the meaning of life through struggle, blood, and death.

Miodrag Bulatović is the most colorful representative of a new generation that burst upon the literary scene in the mid-1950's and which, since then, has become a vital part of contemporary Serbian literature. He achieved wide renown with his first novel, The Red Cock Flies to Heaven (Crveni petao leti prema nebu, 1959), in which he was able to crystallize his point of view and to distill his mode of expression to the point of uncommon artistry. Symbol and metaphor are utilized with increased intensity. Muharem, a poor, meek, slightly deranged illegitimate son of a rich village leader, is the hero, or rather the antihero. He suffers many humiliations at the hands of drunken villagers at the wedding of his half brother. They are especially after his sole possession, a fiery red cock, whom he loves with insane attachment. The cockerel thus becomes the symbol of a human heart vibrating with compassion and love for all. When Muharem is finally dragged into the road dust—it in itself a symbol of the grayness and drabness of everyday life—the cock flies to heaven, heralding the ultimate victory of the insulted and the injured.

To Bulatović, the plot in the novel seems to be less important than the conjuring of a phantasmagoria in the scorching sun at the periphery of a
godforsaken village. The unhappy people, the frustrated and the demented, the drunkards, prostitutes, tramps, and gravediggers are joined by old men with runny noses and young girls with distorted head shapes and withered bosoms, and other unusual creatures. They remind one of the trolls of Norwegian folk tales or the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Breughel, Goya, Chagall, and even Picasso. The impression that lingers on in the reader’s mind is one of an eerie pantomime on a forlorn speck of the earth where the landscape and the people are affected by sun, wine, and general madness.

In his next novel, *The Hero on a Donkey* or *The Time of Shame* (*Heroj na magarcu ili Vreme srama*, 1964), the reality is again blurred beyond recognition through potent symbols, metaphors, and hyperboles.² The world presented here is again populated with grotesque, deranged, perverted sycophants and drunkards, steeped in pornography and inflamed by passion and the evil spirits of war. The protagonist is a tragicomic antihero. An insignificant innkeeper, Gruban Malic, burns with a desire to become a politician and “the greatest military man and Communist of all times.”¹³ But his desire is thwarted time and again by the ludicrous turn of events, by the refusal of the perpetually drunk Italians and of the partisans to treat him like the hero he yearns to be, and by his own grotesque blundering. Malic is a combination of Don Quixote and Soldier Schweik, without the sad resignation of the former and the wisecracking of the latter. But there is more to Malic’s tragedy. He is a squashed insect, typical of Bulatovic’s eerie menagerie, helpless against the crushing forces of evil. That he is incapable of finding his proper place in this nightmare is only too understandable: no one in the novel knows his right place, so overwhelmingly bizarre and cruel is the entire conflict raging in the streets of the small Montenegrin towns and villages and in the hearts of the people. Hence the helplessness of a little man (the meaning of “Malic”). Instead of becoming a hero, Malic hangs himself in a chicken coop, after having been paraded on a donkey (the pinnacle of humiliation) to face the reality from which he had tried to flee. By making Malic a pathetic figure who aspires to be a national hero but who peddles pornography, Bulatovic wants to destroy the myth of heroes in favor of a little man. War is “the time of shame,” as the subtitle implies, and is identical with obscenity. Thus *The Hero on a Donkey* becomes a symbolic antiwar novel.

Miloš Crnjanski’s *Drugá knjiga Seoba* (The Second Book of Migrations, 1962) also involves history.¹⁴ Its genesis is quite interesting. The first book, entitled simply *Seobe* (Migrations, 1929) is generally considered to be one of the best Yugoslav novels written between the wars.¹⁵ In it, Crnjanski depicts the fate of the Serbs living under Austro-Hungarian rule around the middle of the eighteenth century. He tells vividly of their efforts to resist being drowned in a foreign sea. While serving the Austrian army, more or less faithfully, on long treks that take him and his soldiers all the way to Mainz, Colonel Vuk Isakovič never loses sight of his people back home in the fertile lands which are frequently flooded by the Danube and the Sava. Isakovič dreams of leaving this life of semi-occupation and going to Russia, where his Serbian people will enjoy a freer life and understanding among their racial brethren. *Drugá knjiga Seoba* brings the story to a successful conclusion. After many years, Isakovič’s son, Pavle, arrives in Russia with a number of his men and begins a new life. But slowly and inexorably the small Serbian colony is eroded and Russianized, until only a few Serbian names of little towns are left on the map of Russia.

Crnjanski uses this broad canvas to present the plight of a national minority serving a foreign power and attaining independence only through migrating in search of a better life. But the author does not stop here: by ending the second
book with a statement, "There is no death, there are only migrations," he seems to say that the whole of mankind is constantly migrating somewhere, seeking its true identity. Such philosophical undertones give Crnjanski's novels a deeper and universal meaning—that of the Wandering Jew, perhaps. This is both the real and the symbolic meaning of the title.

The second book is remarkably similar in tone and style to the first volume, despite the more than three decades that separate them. The author had intended six volumes of Serobe, but time intervened, preventing him from completing his plans; by now he has abandoned the broadly laid-out epic altogether. But even as it stands and despite its flaws—like Pasternak, Crnjanski is primarily a poet and not a novelist—this torso of an epic is one of the most significant novels in contemporary Yugoslav literature. It is indeed "the novel of a nation."

Osma ofanziva (The Eighth Offensive, 1964) by Branko Ćopić is a fictional sequence to the famous seven offensives the enemy waged against the partisans in the last war. After the trying days of these offensives, during which the humble peasants thought they had passed the hardest tests, they discovered that the hardest test was yet to be passed. Many of these peasants came to the capital to help build the new governing apparatus and were forced into schools and other unaccustomed activities, that changed their entire way of life. For some this was more difficult than any enemy offensive. With a fine understanding and sympathy for his people, Ćopić describes their tribulations in the big city. His characters are aware of the necessity of this latest and, they hope, last offensive, while at the same time they pine for their former uncomplicated, poor, but dear ways of coping with life. Although they had fought during the revolution to improve their lot, when the change came about they became inexplicably sad and nostalgic about the "good old days." The author refrains from making a political satire in this novel—although he has done so in other works. He simply records another stage in the lives of his countrymen from the Bosnian Krajina, whom he has been portraying ever since he entered literature as a student shortly before the last war.

Ćopić is undoubtedly the most popular of all Yugoslav writers. His books have been published in hundreds of editions and millions of copies. He owes his popularity to an extremely warm perceptiveness of the joys and sorrows of common people, his courage to express himself when others remain silent, his humanitarianism that refuses to give evil larger play, and above all his genuine humor, for which he has no peer. All this is found in Osma ofanziva, his most balanced and perhaps best work to date.

A recent novel that has met with universal acclaim and received many prizes is Derviš i smrt (The Dervish and Death, 1966) by the Bosnian writer Mehmed Selimović. This novel grapples with the basic problems of human existence: life and death, the contemplative versus the active life, and the effects of power upon men, both the wielder of power and the ruled. These problems, treated with philosophical, psychological, and purely poetic overtones, give the novel a touch of importance and, at times, of greatness. The dilemma the dervish is faced with—should a contemplatively inclined person forsake his pursuit of wisdom and peace of mind in order to correct human wrongs?—is worked over with great patience and insight. The dervish, whose brother has been unjustly persecuted, leaves the cloistered life to vindicate him. As he grows mightier and as he punishes the wrongdoers, however, he himself is corrupted by that old nemesis of man—power—and becomes a tyrant in his own right. One evil has thus engendered another and the initial goal, the attainment of justice, has been perverted into the miscarriage of justice, despite the best intentions.

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The dervish's efforts to learn about himself and the world and, later, to confront that world as an enemy, are not only psychologically illuminated, they are full of hints at the real substance of, and relationship between, things, which are accessible only to profound thinkers and seers, and even then not always conclusively. The reaction on the part of the reader is not necessarily a pessimistic one, although the tragic aspect is neither denied nor camouflaged. Despite the author's fatalistic inclinations and existentialist attitude, the novel can be considered humanistic. With his stand that "indeed man is a great tyrant and tyrants are far from truth," Selimović argues that man's obligation is to alleviate the inevitability of evil by not taking justice into his own hands and by not disregarding the basic rights of his fellowman. Seen from this angle, Derviš i smrt carries a profound implicit message.

All the writers discussed so far belong either to the prewar or the so-called middle generation. In the 1960's there was a noticeable influx of new writers, most of whom were young, bold, and exciting. They have written many excellent novels, but since most of these writers are still in the formative stage, their works often betray their growing pains and mistakes. One novelist who is remarkably mature for a novice is Dragoslav Mihailović. His When the Pumpkins Bloomed (Kad su cvetale tikve, 1968) immediately attracted attention. It depicts a bold theme—the plight of the supporters of the Russian line after the break with Moscow. It also points at one of the deepest ills of contemporary society everywhere—the alienation of youth. As such, it is one of the many recent novels that indicate a new trend in Yugoslav literature. This trend is manifested in the unusual boldness and disregard for taboos, in the hard criticism of social ills, and in the total absence of idealization and varnishing. There is nothing spurious about this work; the genuineness of the subject matter is almost physically painful. The plot of When the Pumpkins Bloomed centers around the plight of a young worker, who develops into a good boxer, shows no interest in politics and ideological matters, but sees his family destroyed because of politics. His father and brother are persecuted as Russian sympathizers after 1948. His sister is raped and killed by a representative of one segment of present-day youth: those young people who seem to have nothing better to do than to commit acts of brutal hooliganism. But the value of the novel lies not only in the content or in its political implications, it also displays exciting experimentation in the use of street language and in the author's ability to adapt his style to the subject matter. It may be premature to claim greatness, but there are signs of a strange beauty in this unusual work that may survive the scrutiny of time.

These are the most prominent achievements in the Serbian novel in the last twenty-five years. Obviously, many more novels could be discussed, but I hope that, by confining myself to the most outstanding examples, the salient features of this genre in Serbian literature will clearly stand out. I also hope that, by following a chronological order, the process of the maturing of the Serbian novel has been indicated.

To sum up, the contemporary Serbian novel is very much alive. Its most noticeable feature is the wide variety in content and form. In content, the past is often visited and the relationship between the past and the present is thoughtfully analyzed. The last war, with all its ramifications, has been, quite understandably, one of the staple themes. But the war is not always presented one-sidedly as it is in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries; the seamy side is also portrayed, sometimes even caricatured. Contemporary conditions are depicted in all their aspects, especially in the works of the latest novelists.

In form, we see again a great variety: realism in the nineteenth-century style is still present alongside modernistic tendencies, and even pure fantasy. Psychologi-
cal illumination of characters is often coupled with philosophical and sociological analyses. A serious approach is, in some authors, lightened by humor and satire. In style, we find broadly laid-out epics alongside brief novels, descriptions next to impressions of atmosphere, or character studies. In the last few years there has been a great deal of experimentation within the genre, as a result of the influence from abroad. The basic unity of the plot is often neglected, chronology ignored, illustrations and even extensive footnotes are added, and antinovels are attempted. Thus, there is both continuity and novelty in the contemporary Serbian novel.

Just as the Serbian novelists are willing to try new forms, they are equally willing to express themselves freely (within certain limits, of course). There is more freedom of expression in the Serbian novel—as well as in all Yugoslav novels, for that matter—than in any other East European literature. This freedom is expressed mainly through social and moral criticism, but recently it has spilled over into matters of sex and into vocabulary sprinkled with four-letter words. It must be pointed out, however, that an open attack on the existing system is still inconceivable. Whatever criticism there is, it is implicit—expressed by way of the concern for the here and now, preoccupation with everyday events and their immediate impact, and the absence of a desire to escape into ivory towers, never-never land, and art-for-art's sake.

The future of the Serbian novel is bright, insofar as the future of the novel as a genre can be termed hopeful. This optimism is based largely on the fact that many young writers have arrived—and are increasingly arriving—on the literary scene. The further development of the Serbian and Yugoslav novel will probably parallel that of the world novel. For in the last twenty-five years—and this is the most important conclusion—the Yugoslav novel has taken its modest but undisputed place on the stage of world literature.

NOTES


15 Miloš Crnjanski, Seobe (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1929).
16 Miloš Crnjanski, Seobe i Druga knjiga Seoba, p. 1074.
17 Zoran Gluščević, Perom u rabos (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1966), p. 128.
19 Mehmed Selimović, Derviš i smrt (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1966).
22 For a complete list of Yugoslav literature in English translation, see Yugoslavia Literature in English: A Bibliography of Translations and Criticism, ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Mateja Matejić (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974).