

## BRIEF MENTIONS

### BORISLAV PEKIĆ

#### *The Time of Miracles*

Translated by Lovett F. Edwards  
New York: Harcourt Brace  
Jovanovich, 1976. Pp. 320. \$10.95.

In the mid-sixties a group of talented young writers entered the Serbian literary scene with a number of highly acclaimed works, mostly fiction. Since then these writers have furthered their reputation, some of them becoming the leading writers in Serbian literature today. Borislav Pekić (b. 1930) is one of them.

His first novel, *Vreme cuda* (1965), is translated beautifully by Lovett F. Edwards as *The Time of Miracles*. Termed simply a story, it is somewhere between novel, novella, and chronicle. The plot consists of a series of new apocryphal episodes in the life of Jesus Christ. Pekić presents his unorthodox gospel in the name of Judas Iscariot. In his occasionally sacrilegious treatment, Pekić uses an arresting logic: since Judas' betrayal enabled the Scripture to be fulfilled to the letter, he is by no means as despicable a figure as many would have us believe. Indeed, he is portrayed as the only reasonable and veritable character in the entire web of Christian mythology and a make-believe chain of events. Christ is portrayed as a very mortal, selfish, cunning fellow, more often weak than strong; he would rather denounce his holy mission, imposed upon him either by a quirk of fate or by his unbound personal ambition, than go through the hell of crucifixion. Pekić's most startling assertion is that it was not Christ who was crucified but a poor fellow who volunteered to help carry the cross, while Jesus disappeared in the crowd. Other conclusions by Pekić are equally amusing and shocking: the blind man whose sight was restored by Christ would rather not see all the evil and dirt in the world; the mute who was given back his speech is executed by the Romans for saying aloud what hitherto he could only think; Mary Magdalene beseeches Christ to restore her lascivious nature because she feels deprived of the

only true mission given women—to please men. All these twists are probably not new, but they are presented so engagingly, in a polished style and strangely beautiful language resembling that of the Bible, and spiced with such genuine humor that Pekić is readily forgiven his heresy even by those who violently disagree with him.

It was difficult to visualize Pekić returning to our prosaic, unheroic world after this exhilarating journey into the past of myths and legends. But return he did, and during the past decade he published several more novels as well as plays, TV and movie scripts. He lives in England now and continues to write works of unusual value. Even though he is, for the most part, absent from the everyday commotions and polemics in today's Serbian literature, his presence is keenly felt and his contribution gains qualitatively with every new work. Pekić is indeed increasingly becoming one of the leading writers in contemporary Serbian literature.

Vasa D. Mihailovich

### RICHARD WRIGHT

#### *Farthing's Fortunes*

Toronto: Macmillan, 1976.  
Pp. 333.

Though *Farthing's Fortunes* follows all the technical presuppositions of the picaresque mode, Bill Farthing (b. 1880) is not the rogue of hyperbolic adventure and exorbitant appetite, nor the put-upon innocent, that might be expected, in contrast to (say) John Barth's Ebenezer Cooke or George Macdonald Fraser's Flashman. Bill is too ingrainedly "Canadian" for this. Nor do the bizarre and grotesque appear; what is rather seen is an undertone of pathos that buttresses the comic performance. Satire, exposing all sorts and conditions of men, is present, but, characteristic of much Canadian fiction, there