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Biljana D. Obradović and Dubravka Djurić, eds. *Cat Painters: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry from the Sixties to the Present*. New Orleans: Dialogos Press, 2016, pp. 450. ISBN: 978-1-94488-408-6

Reviewed by Svetlana Tomić  
Alfa BK University, Belgrade, Serbia

The book *Cat Painters* presents the most current and comprehensive source of contemporary Serbian poetry. It is a project supported by the Republic of Serbia's Ministry of Culture and Information. For the first time, it offers translations of the last 50 years of Serbian language poetic production in English. This huge and challenging task was executed on 450 pages by 71 poets, 31 translators, and two editors: Biljana D. Obradović, who lives in the USA, and Dubravka Djurić, who lives in Serbia. Both editors are known as productive poets, translators, and academic professors. The collection is dedicated to Charles Simić, an American poet laureate of Serbian origin, and Charles Bernstein, a renowned American poet who introduced Obradović to Djurić. This dedication reflects the editors' experience that the translation practices and collaborations among intellectuals play an important role in mutual enrichment of different cultures and their spheres of art production.

The anthology provides three introductory parts, one by Charles Bernstein and two others by the book editors. In his foreword, Bernstein acknowledges the remarkable translating contribution of Biljana Obradović, who herself translated more than 80% of the poetry included in this book. Thus her work, along with the work of the other translators, as noted by Bernstein, helps this collection to become "a work of English language poetry in its own right." Together with Obradović's generous and enthusiastic translations, Djurić's previous translating work also signifies a noteworthy tradition spanning more than 150 years of intensive translating practice committed by women in Serbian culture.

As a careful and a passionate reader, Charles Bernstein notes that the most frequent word in this anthology is "dark." By adding that there are also other words such as "love, eyes, light, god, nothing, water, words, and window..." Bernstein fuses turbulent and traumatic experiences of Serbian poets during the post-Yugoslav political and economic crises with the poets' strong desire

for beauty and their constant struggle for a meaningful life. In the overture, Bernstein also underlines other distinctive parts of this book. One of them is a new, more inclusive attitude toward marginalized groups. Among 71 poets, half are women, and the editors also acknowledge and support Roma and LGBT poets. A huge diversity of poetry practices and an emphasis on the importance of democratic values are the result of the special editorial mixture, of Obradović, who has lived on many continents, and Djurić, whom Bernstein recognizes as “a strong advocate of both feminism and poetic innovation.”

While the first introduction by Biljana Obradović explains the evolution of the anthology from its ideas development to the final realization of the whole project, the second introduction from Duravka Djurić undertakes another important task. Continuing Obradović's manner of interesting and informative narrating, Djurić offers more details on the development of the Serbian poetry tradition. In addition, she successfully provides a synthesis of established practices, transformations, and turns throughout several centuries. Unlike some historians of Serbian literature, Djurić openly writes about different political pressures and censorship practices. So far, historians have rarely admitted that “Albanian poets from Kosovo were never integrated into the Serbian Yugoslavian milieu, as were the Hungarian poets from Vojvodina.” Furthermore, Dubravka Djurić sheds light on a long tradition of conceptual poetry and equally successful production of haiku poetry. Both practices have remained outside of the Serbian literary canon despite the fact that their value was internationally acknowledged. In presenting different layers of poetry production and reception, Djurić dedicates significant attention to the struggle of the publishing industry to survive and points out some contemporary ways of reaching audiences through new technologies.

One has to look hard in order to find what could have been done better. Small remarks include the following: in light of the fact that the book provides a historical survey, covering a very long period of time, the name of Milica Stojadinovic Srpkinja (1828–78), the very first Serbian woman poet, is not included. It is important to note that, during a tough transitional period of the 1990s in the midst of the breakup of Yugoslavia, civil wars international sanctions, economic crisis, etc., a literary journal specially dedicated to poetry (*Poezija*) appeared in such an environment. Finally, a regional idea, *Sarajevske sveske* (*Sarajevo Notebook*, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and its extraordinary executive editor Vojka Smiljanić Đikić (1932–2016), a poet, translator, and essayist, played a crucial role in establishing new cultural connections between all former Yugoslav countries. In the last 15 years, at a time of the decline of poetry, by regularly publishing poetry, translations, and interpretative production, *Sarajevske sveske* enormously supported poets, providing a rich original and extensive analytical material for readers and scholars

of Slavic literature. In my view, the informativeness of the introduction would have been slightly better had these three points been included.

The *Cat Painters* collection itself is very impressive in its form and content. Unlike other recently published English anthologies of European and Serbian poets, this book introduces every author with a photographic image, often with a one page biography followed by bibliographic references. Thus, readers get insights into the poets' local, regional, and international cultural production. In addition to the visual and textual material, the editors include audio material which is available on the internet. Readers can enjoy hearing several poems read by some of the authors in the Serbian language. Besides different poetic practices, Serbian poets are presented as transnational authors for the first time. Poetry in Serbian is not necessarily written by poets of Serbian origin or by those who live in Serbia. Serbian poets live in other countries as well. They have written and published their work in Serbian but in other languages too. Not surprisingly, the readers will find here a well-renowned and admired poet Kayoko Yamasaki, who has lived in Serbia since 1981 and writes in Japanese and Serbian. As the best Serbian poet, in 2015 Yamasaki received the Milica Stojadinović Srpkinja award. For both editors, it was equally important to include some poets from the Diasporas, from a sphere which has not yet been considered as an integral part of official histories of Serbian literature. This international view of multiplied identities is announced by the editors to readers by choosing Vujica Rešin Tucić to be the first poet of the anthology. Such an opening choice makes this collection a truly vibrant and precious polyphony. It celebrates openness and triumphs with poems of Jelena Savić, a Roma woman who fights for her voice to be heard. With *Cat Painters* her voice can be heard, read, and thought about far away from her country, which still struggles against discrimination and intolerance toward women and minority groups.

As editors, Biljana Obradović and Dubravka Djurić made huge efforts by translating and presenting half a century of Serbian poetry to American readers and other English language audiences. *Cat Painters: An Anthology of Contemporary Serbian Poetry from the Sixties to the Present* transforms the national canon and offers new, diverse, and rich poetic practices. Its poetical and political openness promotes creativity and truly human values. Without a doubt, the book can be described as a valuable collection not only for readers, but also other poets, artists, and scholars. As noted by its reputable American reviewers, its complex structure "sets a new standard for all future poetry anthologies" and future editors. Furthermore, Serbian critics and historians can explore some fascinating links between canonical and non-canonical authors. Perhaps the editors will take into consideration a suggestion to publish this collection in Serbian too.

In addition to the editors' aim of breaking stereotypes of Serbs, this anthology also points to the long ago established and intense cultural connections between American and Serbian poets and artists. These relations and exchanges are implied in the book's cover and its title. The inspiring and provoking artwork "Cat Painter," by contemporary artist Mileta Prodanović, communicates with a self-portrait from another artist and writer, Milena Pavlović Barili as well as the American movie "Cat People" (by Jacques Tourneur in 1942 and remade by Paul Schrader in 1982), transmitting the message of the complex nature of any identity. A decision to emphasize the connectivity between the creativity of differences runs consistently throughout the book. It values differences while at the same time underlines the fact that communication is a fundamental trait of civilization.