



Knife

By Vuk Draskovic

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Knife By Vuk Draskovic

"Knife," by Vuk Draskovic, created a furor when it was published in 1982, long before the beginning of the Balkan Wars of Succession. The novel was condemned by the Communist Part and subsequently banned. "Knife" is the first of his novels to appear in English.

Alija Osmanovic, the protagonist of "Knife," was orphaned during WWII as an infant. He was raised as a Bosnian Muslim and came to believe that Serbs killed his family. When, as a young medical student, he goes in search of the identity of his murdered birth parents, a sense of thwarted justice motivates him, and expresses itself as a burning passion for revenge. Alija seeks out Sikter Effendi, an eccentric and reclusive Muslim cleric, to help him interpret the clues pointing to his identity. Through his mentorship, Alija discovers the truth: that his heritage is Serbian; that he was born not far away but in a neighboring village; and that his adoptive family was guilty of murdering his birth-family. A crisis of identity ensues. Each possible course of action open to him is bad. How is he to go on?

Alija's story is counterpointed by Milan Vilenjak's. He has been training all his life to exact revenge from Atif Tanovic, an Ustashi who single-handedly murdered Milan's entire family. But once Milan has the opportunity to end his enemy's life, he recoils, having discovered that Atif is a human being, a man who exists apart from his monstrous acts, a man who is troubled by his bad conscience. Tanovic, an avowed war criminal, is a repulsive villain who is to be prosecuted and punished, but Draskovic persuades us to sympathize with him. Who cannot admire the profound transformation that occurs when Atif argues against war and the slaughter of innocents? He embodies Draskovic's underlying theme: each act of revenge is a suicide.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

The author of this intense 1982 novel-its publisher's debut offering-is better known as the onetime "King of the Streets" who led student demonstrations against the repressive Serbian government in the early 1990s and remains Slobodan Milosevic's most outspoken political enemy. *Knife* is an ambitious political melodrama that explores the conflicted psyches of two protagonists bent on revenge against their parents' murderers: student Alija Osmanovic, who discovers he shares a troubling kinship with those he considers his bitterest enemies; and Milan Vilenjak, the Javert-like pursuer of a despicable war criminal, Atif Tatovic, who, to Milan's frustration, proves a man of conscience and a genuine penitent. The story's often discursive, and suffers from some redundancy, but has real power-and the complex, suffering figure of Tatovic has an almost Dostoyevskian intensity. A fine start for SCP, and a hopeful indication that more of the literature of the Balkan countries may be reaching us soon. -- *Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

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Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: Serbo-Croatian

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bryan Jones:

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