



Death and the Dervish (Writings from an Unbound Europe)

By Mesa Selimovic



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Death and the Dervish is an acclaimed novel by Bosnian writer Mesa Selimovic. It recounts the story of Sheikh Nuruddin, a dervish residing in an Islamic monastery in Sarajevo in the eighteenth century during the Ottoman Turk hegemony over the Balkans. When his brother is arrested, he must descend into the Kafkaesque world of the Turkish authorities in his search to discover what happened to him. He narrates his story in the form of an elaborate suicide note, regularly misquoting the Koran. In time, he begins to question his relations with society as a whole and, eventually, his life choices in general. Hugely successful when published in the 1960s, *Death and the Dervish* is an enduring classic from twentieth-century Yugoslavia.

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Death and the Dervish (Writings from an Unbound Europe) By Mesa Selimovic Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Lauded by the publisher for its contribution to understanding "the current crisis" in the former Yugoslavia, this tale of moral failure takes place at some undefined point during the Ottoman occupation of Muslim Bosnia. It was a bestseller when published in Yugoslavia in 1966, but it seems probable that its popularity lay more in its portrayal of a Yugoslavia oppressed than in any intrinsic artistry. Ahmed, the dervish of the title, has lived in religious seclusion for most of his life; his searching, self-centered and at times deranged internal dialogue constitutes most of this lengthy narrative. Selimovic (*The Island; The Fortress*) portrays a man hopelessly out of touch with himself and others, viciously in need of being right, secretly coveting power for himself. Groveling before authority, he knowingly betrays innocent people, yet rationalizes everything with perverted interpretations of the Koran. His brother's death, towards the beginning of the novel, and the near-destruction of the community's purest and most generous soul, by the end, enclose a tortuous psychological exposition of the perils of delusion and the ease with which fear destroys the most unyielding moral good. It is a probing portrait containing some valuable insights, yet with a character as insipid as Ahmed, it is hard to really care.

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From Library Journal

Sheikh Ahmed Nuruddin is a dervish (an Islamic ascetic) and spiritual leader of a community during the Turkish occupation of Bosnia. Having spent most of his adult years deliberately avoiding the turmoil of everyday life, he finds himself sucked into its vortex by the arrest of his brother. His reluctant investigation into the matter brings him face to face with his own moral cowardice and causes a devastating crisis of faith that calls into question the value of his entire life. Originally published in Yugoslavia in the 1960s, and subsequently translated into several languages, this late author's chef-d'oeuvre is highly recommended both for Eastern European collections as well as any collection of serious fiction. ?Sister M. Anna Falbo, Villa Maria Coll. Lib., Buffalo, N.Y.

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From Kirkus Reviews

Death And The Dervish (\$39.95; paper \$15.95; Aug. 1996; 480 pp.; 0-8101-1296-5; paper 0-8101-1297-3): A famous novel, originally published in 1966 in Yugoslavia, by an eminent Bosnian author who died (in 1982) before completing the trilogy it was intended to initiate. It's the strange, legendlike story, set in an indeterminate past that appears to be the 18th century, of a Muslim sheikh (or dervish) whose brother is arrested and presumably executed by occupying Turkish rulers. Sheikh Ahmed Nurudin thereafter dedicates his life to destroying the "government" that took his brother from him--and in so doing sets in motion a maelstrom of deception and revenge that causes him to betray his closest friend and, ultimately, ruins his own life. A slow, digressive, tortuous novel that generates enormous power--worthy of comparison with Selimovi's great countryman and forerunner Ivo Andric. It's by no means a perfect work of art, but there is greatness in it. -- *Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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