preliminary and detailed alike, from holdings in the West.

The author is to be warmly congratulated on a remarkable achievement; future volumes in the series, and, indeed, supple-

ments to Western collections will be awaited with impatience.

Arnold McMillin

Husoŭski, Mikoła. *Pieśnia pra zuba na tacinskaj, biełaruskaj, ruskaj movach*. Trans. by Jazep Siemiazon and Ja. I. Poreckij. Ed. and annot. by Viktor Daraškievič. 'Mastackaja litaratura', Minsk, 1980. 192 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography.

Novaja ziamla and *Symon-muzyka* represent the magnificent twin apogee of a long epic tradition in Byelorussian literature; a tradition whose history remains to be written and whose outlines are to this day but dimly perceived. Popular 19th-century burlesques like *Enieida navyvarat* and *Taras na Parnasie* have been successful in their own right as distorted reflections of a not necessarily native epic tradition, and a century later exuberant political effusions like Čarot's *Čyrvanakryty viaščun* and *Bosyja na vohniščach* represent a hardly less burlesque version of the genre (epics of the Stalin period such as *Kołas' Rybakova chata* and *Kupała's Tarasova dola* are perhaps best forgotten). But the roots of this tradition, like so much else in our knowledge of Byelorussian literature, remain obscure. The country's troubled socio-political history, ever marked by shifting boundaries and disputed identity, with until recent times Pole and Russian alike asserting political and cultural domination, has meant that much of medieval Byelorussian literature remains unrecognized as such. On the positive side, however, this also means that exciting new discoveries can be and, indeed, are being made from time to time, calling for radical reinterpretation of received views on the country's development. One major discovery, or rather rediscovery, of this kind is of the magnificent Latin epic *Pieśnia pra zuba* (*Carmen de statura, feritate ac venatione Bisontis*, 1523) by Mikoła Husoŭski

(Nikolaus Hussoviensis) (b. 1470-80, d. after 1533).

Husoŭski, so far as is known from external sources or can be deduced from internal evidence, was the son of a hunter employed by one of the Princes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and extensive detailed knowledge of the flora, fauna, and customs of his native land finds rich reflection in the poem, which like Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (a work to which it has been compared) is as broad in scope and national significance as its ostensible theme is narrow. Husoŭski's literary activities appear to have been first inspired by his close friend and patron Erasmus Vitellius, a secretary in the Chancery of the Grand Duchy, and a highly cultured man with a keen interest in his native literature. Vitellius travelled widely as a state emissary, and on the third of his official visits to the Vatican (1518-22) he was accompanied by Husoŭski, to whom it fell to write a poem about boar hunting for Pope Leo X, himself an amateur of poetry and hunting. *Pieśnia pra zuba*, undoubtedly the most outstanding example of 16th-century Byelorussian Latin literature, was written in 1522 and first published in Cracow in the following year. There followed several more 16th-century editions, and then neglect until 1855 when the Cracow 1523 edition was republished in St Petersburg. In the 1960s Husoŭski's poem was brought to the attention of a wider

audience by first a Lithuanian translation and a little later Byelorussian and Russian versions by Jazep Siemiazon and Ja. I. Poreckij. The latter are now brought together with the original in a handsome trilingual jubilee edition, adorned with attractive woodcut illustrations by Jaŭhien Kulik, and completed by an Afterword, Commentary and Bibliography compiled by the volume's editor, Viktor Daraškiewicz.

Whatever reservations one may have about the quality of the translations, this volume is most welcome for the attention it draws to a major monument of medieval culture. Written in somewhat Ovidian elegiac couplets, *Pieśnia pra zubra* is imbued with great lyricism as well as heroic pathos, breadth of vision together with a close eye for detail, and some elements of humour alongside a pervading sense of tragedy at the contemporary weakness and ineffectiveness of the Grand Duchy, embodied in the bison itself. The poem's syntax reflects in part the influence of Husoŭski's vernacular, but there is nothing crude or halting in his magnificent command of vocabulary and imagery. Much of this is caught in Jazep Siemiazon's Byelorussian translation, a gifted piece of work which, however, contains so many anachronisms as to prompt comparisons with *Ben Hur* as a portrait of ancient Rome, or perhaps Stokowski's romantic renditions of Bach as authentic baroque (Poreckij's Russian version is much more faithful). The Byelorussian translator has been severely taken to task for these 'mistakes' in the Soviet press: amongst others Piotr Sadoŭski ('Kulturna-moŭnyja pytaŭni biełaruskaha pierakładu', *Potymia*, 1981, no. 7, pp. 178-98, especially pp. 183-7) excoriates Siemiazon for the modern, 'democratic', almost

anti-clerical views which he imputes to Husoŭski and his work (*Pieśnia pra zubra* was, after all, a papal commission). These lapses are, indeed, annoyingly inappropriate, but, as with Hollywood and Stokowski, they reflect a different ethos rather than simple inability to maintain a shared cultural standard.

Whatever its shortcomings, this version of Husoŭski's *magnum opus* often reads like original poetry and should open many readers' eyes to the richness of Byelorussian cultural achievement. It is now to be hoped that Siemiazon will turn to Husoŭski's other Latin poetry. Some of his major works have already appeared in Russian versions by Poreckij, and certainly deserve to be put into Byelorussian. Outstanding among them are Husoŭski's poetic *vita* of St Hyacinthus (1525), his outraged poetic reaction to the pagan excesses witnessed during the Italian plague of 1522, 'On the Sacrifice of a Black Bull', an exquisite Sapphic verse to St Sebastian, and a heroic epic entitled *A New and Glorious Victory over the Turks in the Month of July* (1524).

The chances are small of a new masterpiece by Shakespeare coming to light in the 20th century, but the rich mine of Byelorussia's cultural heritage is far from being exhausted, and exciting products will continue to emerge from time to time. Thus, just as the recently discovered *Lament* on the death of Laoncij Karpovič (1620) threw exciting new light on the level of literary culture in 17th-century Byelorussia, so *Pieśnia pra zubra* stands out as a milestone in the history of the previous century. In such a handsome presentation tome it should win many new friends.

Arnold McMillin