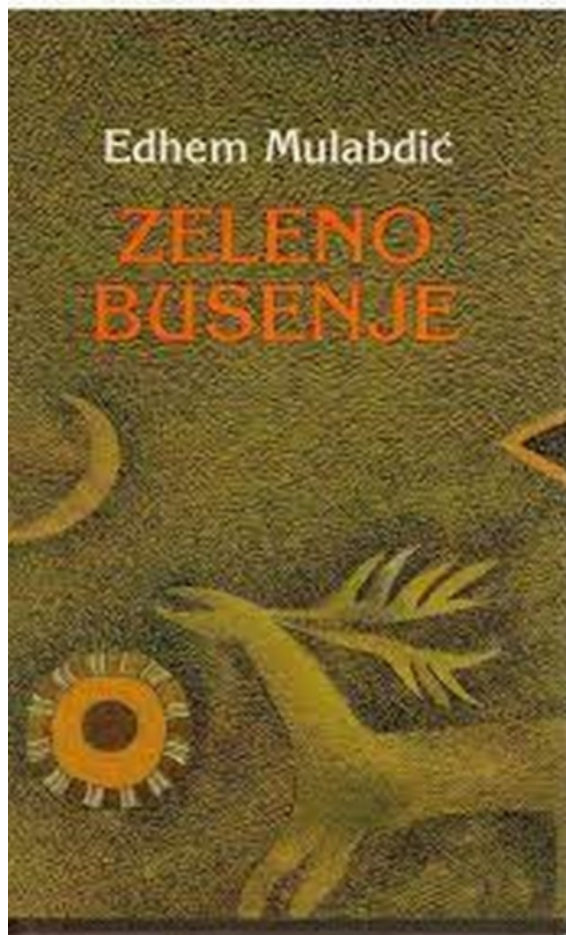


Zeleno Busenje (Green Turf) by Edhem Mulabdić – Distant Reading for European Literary History

by Christof Schöch : 6-8 minutes

The sixth article of the *Distant Reading Recommends* series is written by Vedad Mulavdić of the University of Sarajevo and Meliha Handžić of the International Burch University in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They describe Zeleno busenje (Green Turf), the “first Bosniak novel” of so-called “minor” European literatures. The novel will be included in the Bosnian corpus of ELTeC. It can be read at <https://archive.org/details/MulabdiEdhemZelenoBusenje>.



Book cover of the 1995 edition of Zeleno busenje, photo by Meliha Handžić

First Bosniak novel

The novel *Zeleno busenje* (*Green Turf*) by Edhem Mulabdić holds a special place in the history of Bosnian literature of the Austro-Hungarian period. Its significance for the development of modern literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognised by many scholars. The work was declared the “first Bosniak novel” and given a central position in the literary canon of modern Bosnian literature (Kazaz 2004). This contributed to increased interest in studying this novel. The first edition of the novel was published in 1898. Since then, there have been various editions of the novel, as well as many critical reviews.

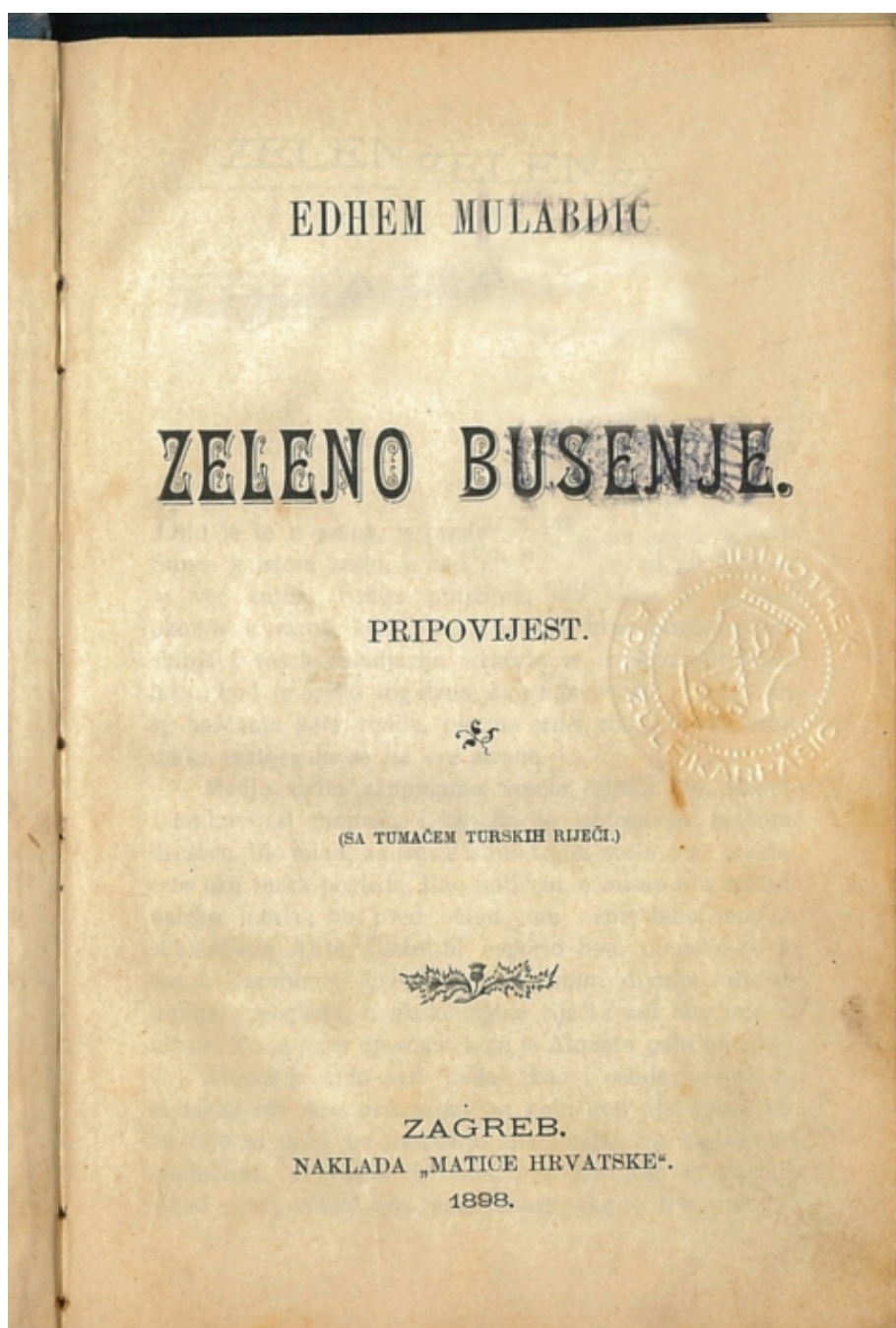
The author, Edhem Mulabdić (1862–1954) was born in Maglaj, and died in Sarajevo. He belonged to the pleiad of prominent Bosnian authors from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century who carried the burden of adapting to the new Western European lifestyle brought by the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarić 2002). He was among the first Bosniak authors who was educated in new, secular educational institutions, where he learned the Latin alphabet. During his life, Mulabdić was a prolific writer and published a wide array of works. His literary and cultural opus consisted of novels, stories and translations (most often from German and Turkish). He also collected traditional stories that would find their way into his own literary creations and the linguistic expression in these. It is important to note that, in the novel *Green Turf*, Mulabdić used some autobiographical elements, like his mother’s death, learning the Latin alphabet, or going to Sarajevo for his schooling, as well as the setting of the novel, which is in his birthplace of Maglaj.



Photo: Wikipedia, Public domain

A novel about the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The theme of the novel *Green Turf* is the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as experienced by the small town of Maglaj (Braun 2009). The narrative structure consists of three parallel processes: (a) a social one, which is reflected in the wider historical context and the impact of the Austro-Hungarian occupation on the Bosnian milieu and all the layers of Bosnian society; (b) a family one, presenting the destiny of a respected Maglaj-based family; and (c) an intimate-romantic one, involving the love between the two main characters (Ahmet and Ajiša; Rizvić 1990; Hadžizukić 2011). The Austro-Hungarian occupation is experienced as a shocking event that fundamentally changed the lives of all citizens of Maglaj, regardless of their social status. In addition, the differing ideological views of the population regarding the occupation are shown. On one hand, there was the conservative ideological stream, which viewed the act of the occupation as fatalistic, as the end of a determined historical time and life order, and which was very opposed to the new reality (Kodrić 2012). On the other hand, there were those among the progressive forces, who thought that resistance to the well-organised Austro-Hungarian military was futile and that the new reality needed to be accepted. Thus, the novel is both a sign of the tragic and dramatic crushing of souls and destinies and a memorial to the discovery of a new way of life and new perspectives.



Cover of the first edition, photo by Meliha Handžić

Language of the novel

The novel *Green Turf* is also significant for the study of Bosnian literary language, as it consists of the main features of Bosnian literary language of the Austro-Hungarian time. It also reflects all the characteristics of literary expression in the works of Edhem Mulabdić. Essentially, this author's linguistic expression is marked by a combination of linguistic elements that come from the structure of language, as well as the literary and linguistic tradition. In addition, in the language of the novel, we can also find a range of features specific solely to the Bosnian language. The grammatical aspect of the work is also interesting, as grammar differs in the different editions of the novel. Their comparison reveals that the language of the author had been sometimes “reworked” by introducing Croatisms Croatianisms through translations of words of oriental origin or of vernacular terms from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mulavdić 2020).

Based on everything that has been said, we can conclude that the novel *Green Turf* by Edhem Mulabdić is a work that deserves the full attention of researchers in the fields of literary history, as well as philology. Its significance also lies in the fact that it is a work that shows that the understanding of language and literature in a certain cultural and historical moment is concretely reflected in the linguistic and poetic features of the given literature.

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