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WALT WHITMAN IN THE YUGOSLAV INTERWAR PERIODICALS: SERBO-CROATIAN RECEPTION, 1918–1940

BOJANA AĆAMOVIĆ



ON APRIL 5, 1892, the Croatian periodical *Narodne novine* (*People's Newspaper*) published a short unsigned note commemorating the recent death of Walt Whitman. Among other items in the section “Various News,” readers learned:

In the city of Camden, state of New Jerdey [sic] a highly respected American poet Walt Whitman died on March 27 [sic]. He was born on May 31, 1819, and was in all respects self-educated. With his beautiful verses he particularly celebrated the Civil War fought for the abolition of slavery.¹

Less than a month after this, on May 1, 1892, the Belgrade periodical *Otadžbina* (*Homeland*) published the article “A Letter from London” written by the Serbian statesman and diplomat Čedomilj Mijatović. The article provides an account of the most topical issues from the Anglo-American press and also includes a mention of Whitman’s death, here placed among other current events:

The panegyrics for the late James Russel Lowell, a poet N. America lost last year, have not quite ceased, and already the death of another very popular poet Walt Whitman causes all magazines to analyze the poetry of this original old man.²

Comparing Whitman to Lowell, whom Mijatović knew personally and whom he describes as “more of an Englishman than American,” the Serbian author remarks: “Whitman is full of spirit and original thoughts and true poetic feelings, but is unrefined, limps in his metrics, and he mostly sang in free verse” (176). These two brief mentions are currently believed to be the first appearances of Walt Whitman’s name in written texts published in Serbo-Croatian. The poet’s death was thus the beginning of his lasting presence in the Serbo-Croatian cultural space.³

Although these commemorative notes indicate that Walt Whitman was a familiar name in the intellectual circles of this region, it was not until 1900 that readers were introduced to the poetry of this “very popular poet.” The first translations were published in the Croatian magazine *Svjetlo* (*The Light*) in 1900, which was followed by a nine-year break before the activity of translating Whitman was resumed. All but two translations into Serbo-Croatian published between 1909 and 1914 appeared in magazines issued in Sarajevo (Bosnia), at the time a focal point of the region’s turbulent political life following the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia in 1908 and the formation of movements dedicated to the national liberation from foreign rule.⁴ The historical circumstances and public engagement of the magazine editors and contributors indicate that the inclusion of Whitman’s poetry in these periodicals (especially *Bosanska vila* [*Bosnian Fairy*]) was part of endeavors to promote liberation, not only national, but also intellectual and spiritual.

The early translations largely set the tone of the later practices in translating Whitman, especially those in the interwar period. Both before and after the First World War, only individual shorter poems or parts of longer ones were translated, and these appeared almost exclusively in periodicals.⁵ The choice of poems seems haphazard, unsystematic, and determined by the personal preferences of the translators as the same person would publish two or more translations in different magazines. However, unlike the pre-war translations, which mostly appeared in Sarajevo, those published after the war were dispersed across a greater number of periodicals issued in different cities all over the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Owing to various sociocultural circumstances, Sarajevo ceased to be the center of Whitman-translating activities, which moved to Zagreb (in the years immediately after the war) and Belgrade (in the 1920s), with occasional poems appearing in Niš (Serbia) and Split (Croatia). At the same time, Whitman became the topic of numerous essays and articles published in literary magazines and various daily and weekly newspapers.

Previous scholarship on the Serbo-Croatian reception of Whitman was mostly silent on the translations and essays that appeared before World War II. In his 1955 contribution, Stephen Stepanchev dedicates only one paragraph to Whitman’s reception in Yugoslavia, mentioning only two translations (from 1912 and 1920) and one essay (1925) before moving on to Tin Ujević’s book-length translation published in 1951.⁶ Sonja Bašić’s text published in 1972 offers a very brief and incomplete overview of the pre-World War I reception, and except for pointing to the two important essays on Whitman from 1919, does

not mention anything from the interwar period asserting that “the occasional reviews and more numerous translations of the pre-war [World War II] period appeared mainly in the first two decades of this century.”⁷ The latest on this topic, the contribution from Arthur Golden, Marija Golden, and Igor Maver in *Walt Whitman and the World* (1995) for the most part repeats the information from Stepanchev’s and Bašić’s essays, with occasional inaccuracies.⁸ While this essay is rather informative on the Yugoslavian post-World War II reception (especially the book-length translations that appeared from 1951 onwards), as well as on the Slovenian reception in the interwar period, it provides very little information on the translations and essays written in Serbo-Croatian and published before 1940.

I am most indebted to Ljiljana Babić’s 1976 essay, “Walt Whitman in Yugoslavia.”⁹ Babić offers quite a comprehensive overview of the Serbo-Croatian reception with the bibliographic data on both the translations and essays on Whitman, as well as brief remarks on the quality of the translations, content of the essays, the periodicals they appeared in and the translators. Although the author does not delve into a deeper analysis of the texts, limiting herself to the factual observations, the information Babić presents has enabled me to trace the mentioned texts (except for those that seem to have been lost in the meantime), to examine them and the periodicals in more detail, and to consider Whitman’s Serbo-Croatian reception in the broader sociocultural context. Such contextualizing has shown that translating, writing, and thinking about Whitman in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (i.e., the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) responded both to current tendencies in the world of arts and letters, and to the broader political and social discourse. Focusing on the interwar period has proved to be particularly rewarding since the two decades during which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia existed were times of great turmoil, struggle, and changes in literature, culture, and society, which also affected the perception of foreign authors, Whitman included.

Considering the sociocultural context of the interwar years and the general orientation of the periodicals publishing translations and essays on Whitman (this analysis does not include essays on other topics that briefly mention Whitman), we can distinguish two predominant approaches to the American poet. On the one hand, Whitman was seen as a quintessentially modern poet, a harbinger of a novel democratic expression, admired for his poetic innovations and powerful imagery. On the other hand, Whitman’s poetry attracted the members of different socialist groups, who regarded him as a poet of workers and social justice. The translation and critical reception of Whitman’s work

were also largely conditioned by the connections of the Yugoslav authors with the European intellectual circles. Following the appearance of Whitman's name in the newspapers and magazines offers insight into the international circulation of the periodicals and the collaboration of artistic and activist groups from different countries.

Re-Introducing Whitman

The Great War significantly changed Europe's shape, and the new political and economic circumstances greatly affected the continent's cultural life. Poets and artists were quick to recognize that the devastation brought by the war was also a global experience, affecting communities all over the world in similar ways. The internationalism which developed through different artistic movements engendered new intellectual networks, connecting creative minds of different countries. However, the shared experience of the recent war was not the only thing they had in common; links between them had been established long before the war, which, though it was a disruption, was neither a complete discontinuation of previously developing tendencies nor a radical shift to something completely new. Indeed, the most prominent features of the 1920s modernism developed before the war, some of them in the nineteenth century. The war had confirmed the decaying state of the European civilization, and the already existent demands for change were radicalized in the postwar years. Some European modernists perceived America as a source of fresh energy and Walt Whitman as an American poet that would bring this energy to the rest of the world.

The continuity in cultural trends can be seen also in the regions which in 1918 formed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Although some of the most progressive prewar initiators of literary and publishing activities had left the scene, new ones took their place in advocating the liberation from foreign political and cultural influences and the foundation of a modern society. Such was the literary magazine *Književni Jug* [*Literary South*], issued in Zagreb from January 1, 1918 to December 1, 1919,¹⁰ which voiced its open support for the idea of Yugoslavism (the unity of the South Slavic peoples) and the liberation from the Austro-Hungarian rule. According to some literary historians, *Književni Jug* was in fact a political review in which the contributors expressed their opinions through literary texts.¹¹ Founded with an aim of preparing the ground for the future Yugoslav literature, it gathered pro-Yugoslav authors, Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian, mostly from the still-occupied South Slavic regions of Austria-Hungary, many

of whom were recently released out of or even still interned in Austrian war prisons. The contributors of *Književni Jug* formed a heterogeneous group from different and often antagonistic political or literary groups, who would eventually part ways and collaborate with far-right or far-left movements. Contributions were published in Ekavian or Ijekavian dialects, in the Latin as well as Cyrillic script, which was also an act of rebellion considering that the Cyrillic script was banned by Austrian authorities at the time.

It was in *Književni Jug* that the first postwar Serbo-Croatian translations of Whitman appeared. Included in the very first issue of the magazine were three Whitman's poems: part 3 of "Chanting the Square Deific," "When I Peruse the Conquered Fame," and "To the States."¹² The choice of the poems reflected the current aspirations of the editors and contributors, their long struggle for political and cultural freedom aptly expressed through Whitman's lines, "Aloof, dissatisfied, plotting revolt, / Comrade of criminals, brother of slaves" and "Resist much, obey little."¹³ Another translation, this time of the poem "On the Beach at Night," was published in the November issue of the same year.¹⁴ Although all of these translations were unsigned, Ljiljana Babić and the bibliographers of the Serbo-Croatian Whitman translations ascribe them to Ivo Andrić,¹⁵ which is a well-founded assumption considering that Andrić had been translating Whitman and in 1912 published his translations of Sections 18 and 21 of "Song of Myself" in *Srpski književni glasnik* (*Serbian Literary Gazette*) and *Bosanska vila* (*Bosnian Fairy*), respectively. Andrić was also one of the founding editors of *Književni Jug* and editor of the magazine's poetry section. According to literary historian Nenad Ljubinković, two of the translated poems ("To the States" and "When I Peruse the Conquered Fame") used to "warm the souls" of the Yugoslavs in Austria-Hungary.¹⁶

At the time, Ivo Andrić was an aspiring young poet drawn to the new avant-garde trends in poetry and already established in the literary circles of the region as a former supporter of the Young Bosnia Movement and a great proponent of the liberation and cultural advancement of the South-Slavic peoples.¹⁷ His fascination with Whitman originated from his Young Bosnia days and found its most articulate expression in a 1919 essay in *Književni Jug* on the occasion of Whitman's centennial.¹⁸ Andrić's essay "Walt Whitman (1819–1919)" offers a concise but informative overview of Whitman's life and work, marking all the crucial events.¹⁹ One of the sources for this essay was most probably *A Life of Walt Whitman* (London: Methuen, 1905) by Henry Bryan Binns, whom Andrić refers to as Whitman's "best biographer."²⁰ Andrić doesn't delve into the particulars of Whitman's poetics, only occasionally quoting a line or two to illustrate some of

his points,²¹ but he intimates what this poetry meant for him and his generation, calling it their medicine and joy and comparing it to a Japanese well which promises the restoration of youthful vigor. Reading Whitman brought relief from the dismal circumstances of what Andrić calls “our dark Slavic sorrow.” Conceding that he cannot properly define Whitman who defies all conclusive definitions and formulas, Andrić describes him as the poet of body and soul, liberty, struggle, energy, health, courage, democracy, love, and religion. The essay culminates in a declaration that Whitman is not only a daring poet but a prophet whose legacy to future generations is free interaction and solidarity of all races.

This double issue of the magazine included another essay on the same topic written by another young Serbian poet and intellectual, Anica Savić Rebac.²² Her essay “The Centennial of Walt Whitman” is less biographical and more analytical, placing Whitman in the context of his and her own time and considering his ideas as part of the discourse which shaped the modern world. Savić Rebac was a classical philologist, poet, and translator, one of the first women intellectuals in Serbia and Yugoslavia, whose work remained long neglected and has been studied in more detail only in recent decades after feminist and gender studies started to gain ground. She was conversant in several European languages, both living (German, French, English) and dead (Latin and old Greek) and, especially important in this context, was an adept English translator, translating mostly poetry both from and into English.²³ This was an extraordinary ability, at a time when very few Serbian intellectuals had a satisfactory reading competence of English. German and French were the most prevalent foreign languages in these regions and many of Whitman translators used German or French translations as source texts, either because of their inadequate knowledge of English or because books in English were harder to obtain.

Despite Savić Rebac’s excellent education and the fact that she was well-known to the magazine editors as a frequent and versatile contributor, the magazine did not allot her essay on Whitman as prominent a place as Andrić’s. While Andrić’s essay was featured on the first pages of this double issue of *Književni Jug*, Anica Savić Rebac’s contribution appeared towards the end of the issue, in the “Literary Overview” (Section 14), along with three other texts, all reviews of recently published books by Croatian, Slovenian, and Serbian authors. The article by Savić Rebac, however, is hardly a review of only one book; it offers a competent analysis of Whitman’s poetics and considers the significance of his poetry in shaping not only the American literature, but also the American

identity. Savić Rebac sees Whitman as the greatest poet-maker of the American nation and the celebration of the poet's centennial as "the most beautiful apotheosis of Americanism." Whereas "the Old Europe has long forgotten the times when her poets were in the highest sense the educators, and thus the makers of her peoples," the American nation received in Whitman a poet who gathered within himself all of its greatest features and who was for America what Homer had been for the ancient Greece.²⁴

Savić Rebac considers Whitman a poet of optimism and future, a poet who had a right to sing more than anybody else, for "nobody had a broader vision of humanity than him." Whitman's poetry is not to be read merely for an aesthetic pleasure because he was primarily the maker of generations. By insisting on freedom, the development of one's own personality, and the equality among people, he "was creating Americanism, so that it would create an ideal human-kind in turn." In Whitman's celebration of the individual, Savić Rebac sees a connection to Nietzsche as the greatest modern individualist. Though there are no direct references to specific editions of Whitman's works or biographical accounts which could be taken as sources, some of the author's observations suggest that she was familiar with *Democratic Vistas* and Whitman's other prose writings, or at least with the ideas presented in them. Her solid knowledge of Whitman's work is demonstrated through competently chosen sentences from the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* and poetic lines from "Starting from Paumanok," "For You O Democracy," "Small the Theme of My Chant," and "Years of the Modern."

If the earliest Serbo-Croatian reception of Whitman's work started with the pieces commemorating his death, the interwar reception opened much more optimistically, with celebrations of the poet's birth. The two essays from *Književni Jug* are milestones in the Serbo-Croatian and Yugoslav reception of Whitman—written from slightly different perspectives and focusing on different aspects, but both acknowledging the importance of Whitman's work for the modern thought. Both Andrić and Savić Rebac recognize that Whitman's poetry cannot be measured by classic literary standards nor deemed refined in the sense of the traditional aesthetics. At the beginning of his essay, Andrić remarks that the value and meaning of Whitman's personality and poetry are not to be judged by the "everyday literary measures nor the European aesthetic casts," as his poetry should not be examined line by line but only as a whole (49). Savić Rebac observes that Whitman's poetry "was not made to give pleasure," which is why it can appear awkward to the people accustomed to the traditional art. Whitman asks for "the whole person, the will as well as the intellect" and challenges his

readers to take a stand towards him with their own instincts and notions.²⁵ The two Serbian authors point to the novelty of Whitman's expression in the form and content of his poetry, whose primeval energy should invigorate and revitalize the work of future generations, i.e., their contemporaries.

Apart from these two essays, the year of Whitman's centennial saw the appearance of new Serbo-Croatian translations of Whitman's poetry: five translated poems were published in three different pro-worker or socialist oriented publications (two periodicals and an almanac), all issued in Zagreb. The February issue of the weekly *Ilustrovane novosti* (*Illustrated News*) brings three Whitman's poems translated by Marko N. Nani (one previously untranslated into Serbo-Croatian, "Gods," and two new translations of "On the Beach at Night Alone" and "Poets to Come").²⁶ Two of Whitman's poems on war themes, a new translation of "Ashes of Soldiers" and previously untranslated "Beat! Beat! Drums!," appeared in the Zagreb magazine *Plamen* (*The Flame*) and in *Almanah socijalističke omladine* (*The Almanac of the Socialist Youth*), respectively.²⁷ The overall orientation of these publications and the choice of the poems indicates that the editors saw Whitman mainly as a socialist and workers' poet. As these are hardly isolated cases, this aspect of Whitman's Serbo-Croatian reception will be discussed separately.

Whitman's Modernity and the New Literature

The 1920s in Europe were years of rebuilding, recovery, and adjusting to the new sociopolitical context. Newness was a keyword in art and literature, as well, and for progressive artists and poets, the postwar situation justified their earlier demands for changes in creative expression. Those leaning towards the modern tendencies believed that literature and poetry needed to start exploring different topics and using different forms to better reflect the new circumstances and initiate further changes in society. The more radical among them, today designated as avant-gardists, criticized art's institutionalization in bourgeois society as "unassociated with life praxis of men,"²⁸ whereas they believed the new literature and art should play an active role in shaping the world. The European avant-garde movements mushroomed during the 1920s in the shape of numerous *isms*, existing in different countries but connected by the same eagerness to create a new and better world out of the postwar rubble. These movements collectively formed an international network of artists, poets, publishers, and other intellectuals, operating through a dynamic exchange of ideas, publications, art and literary works.²⁹ For many in these groups, Whitman was among the

nineteenth-century figures whose work encouraged their progressivist ideals of replacing the old traditional patterns with fresh, innovative, and daringly experimental forms of expression. Closely following these modernist and avant-garde tendencies in Europe, the Yugoslav authors accepted Whitman and his bold innovations, free verse, and risqué themes as signposts for developing modern literature and culture.

The literary and cultural life in the South-Slavic regions began to recuperate following the war, and during the 1920s the Yugoslav intellectuals, writers, artists, and journalists enthusiastically undertook the task of reviving the scene. New daily and weekly newspapers, as well as a number of literary magazines appeared, and while many of them were short-lived, they are important indicators of the postwar circumstances in Yugoslav society and culture. With the book market still afflicted by the scarcity of the war years, these periodicals were the platform for presenting the newest literary production and for embittered disputes between conservative and liberal-minded authors. Some of the latter showed a special interest in Whitman and devotedly promoted his poetry and ideas through their essays and translations.

Svetislav Stefanović was one of the first Serbian intellectuals to identify Whitman as a predecessor of the modern poetry in his essays on various literary topics, including those defending the free verse. Although a physician by profession, Stefanović was prominent in the literary circles both before and after the war, contributing poems, essays, art and literary criticism to a number of literary magazines across the region. He was also renowned as a translator of Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe, as well as Whitman. Stefanović's translation of Whitman's Civil War poem "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing" was published in the literary-political magazine *Misao* (*Thought*) in the last number for 1919.³⁰ *Misao* was issued in Belgrade twice a month from 1919 until 1937 and was primarily a literary review, but also included articles in the fields of philosophy, history, science, politics, economics, music and art criticism. Whitman's poem was well suited to the postwar atmosphere with its plea for remembering the dead soldiers whose bodies would become compost and thus enter the foundations of the new country. That this poem found its way to the pages of *Misao* seems to be primarily Stefanović's credit since publishing foreign literature in translation wasn't among the editors' priorities—Whitman is one of the very few foreign authors in this volume.³¹

The following year, Stefanović published four translations of Whitman, the first of which was of the poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" in the Easter number of the periodical *Republika* (*The Republic*), within a special literary supplement and

placed prominently in the middle of the spread.³² Whitman was the only foreign author included in this number and the poem was accompanied by a note saying that his “powerful dithyramb”—which today should be addressed to the children of the East, not the West—could make the reader feel “all the dynamics of ideas and phrases of this greatest American and one of the greatest world poets, who was an elated preacher of the universal democratic republic and an apostle of the positive and not mystified nor buffoonish humanity.”³³ Whitman’s enthusiasm conveyed by the poem and additionally emphasized by the note corresponded well with the policy of *Republika* as an organ of the Republican Democratic party. At the time, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was officially a unitary constitutional monarchy and the Republican Democratic Party was one of the oppositional forces campaigning for the federalization and democratization of the state, as well as the abolition of monarchy. This issue of *Republika* also contains a report on the recent socialist demonstrations in Copenhagen and the lectures on republicanism given by one of the party’s leaders. Although Stefanović, as a literary critic and a poet, was primarily interested in Whitman’s poetic innovations, his translation of “Pioneers” in this newspaper shows his awareness that this poetry can also be an agent of social activism.³⁴

Later in 1920, three of Stefanović’s translations of Whitman appeared in the renowned literary magazine *Srpski književni glasnik* (*Serbian Literary Gazette*, hereafter *SKG*). Issued in Belgrade from 1901 to 1914 and then again from 1920 to 1941 (as a “new series”), *SKG* gathered prominent writers, poets, literary and art critics, as well as scholars in different fields. Its founder and one of the editors, Bogdan Popović, was a respected authority on literature, art, and cultural issues, and also a great anglophile (although much more inclined toward British rather than American literature). The majority of contributions in the magazine were by the Yugoslav authors and thus it was somewhat exceptional that this November issue contained three Whitman’s poems: “Dirge for Two Veterans,” “For You O Democracy,” and part 16 of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”³⁵ Stefanović again chose poems appropriate for the postwar situation—with their pensive and elegiac tone, death as a dominant theme, but also their optimism that love of comrades and spirit of democracy will spread.

Interestingly, unlike all the other Serbo-Croatian translators from this period, Stefanović did not base his translations on the poems as they appear in the 1891-1892 “Deathbed Edition” of *Leaves of Grass*. As indicated in the note on Whitman in a later edition where these translations were reprinted,³⁶ the source was W. M. Rossetti’s selection of Whitman’s poetry, i.e., the 1868 British edition based on the fourth (1867) edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This explains the

changes in the poems' titles and the additions and omissions of some lines.

The view of Whitman as a predecessor of the modern poetic expression gained traction during the 1920s owing to the vibrant European literary exchange through the newly established intellectual networks. Many young authors from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia gained insight into the activities of European literary and artistic circles during the war or immediately after, as they spent some time in other parts of Europe, mainly France, as soldiers, students, or journalists. For some, the immersion in French culture and popular trends started even before the war: Augustin (Tin) Ujević, a celebrated Croatian poet and the translator of the first book-length collection of Whitman's poetry in Serbo-Croatian, lived in Paris from 1913 to 1919, at which time he became acquainted with contemporary French poets and, through them, with Walt Whitman. As Antun Nizeteo notes, "there is no doubt that the rising fortune of Whitman in French literature stimulated Ujević's own interest and admiration for the American poet and his work."³⁷ Living in Paris was an opportunity for young authors like Ujević to familiarize themselves not only with the works of the celebrated writers and poets—both contemporary and of the previous ages—but also with a variety of periodicals they would continue to follow upon their return to Yugoslavia.

Boško Tokin was among the young Serbian intellectuals who, having escaped from the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbia, were given refuge in France in 1916 and spent the rest of the war in Paris. During this time, Tokin took part in the many cultural activities the city offered even in wartime, kindling his lifelong interest in avant-garde art and literature, film, and certain figures, such as Charlie Chaplin and Walt Whitman. In the 1920s, Tokin worked as a journalist publishing essays, literary and film criticism, and, along with Ljubomir Micić and Ivan (Yvan) Goll, founded the magazine *Zenit*, the organ of the highly progressive, inventive, but also controversial Yugoslav avant-garde movement Zenitism. Ivan Goll, a German-French-Jewish expressionist/surrealist, was an important European Whitmanite, who in 1919 published a translation of Whitman's Civil War prose in the volume *Der Wundpfleger (The Nurse)*, printed by the Swiss publisher Rascher.³⁸

During 1920 and 1921, Boško Tokin wrote three texts on Walt Whitman, published in three Belgrade periodicals.³⁹ The first of these, "U. S. A.= Poe, Whitman, Chaplin," appeared in a feuilleton section of the independent political daily *Progres (Progress)*, issued in Belgrade and discontinued after only six months.⁴⁰ The article bears a dedication to Slavko Vorkapić, Tokin's friend who went to Hollywood in 1920 and built a successful career as a film editor, director, cinema theorist, and university lecturer, or in Tokin's words, "who

went to America to take pictures of Charlot” (i.e., Charlie Chaplin). The motto for this text is Whitman’s, or rather a Whitmanian line, constructed by blending two lines from two sections of “Song of the Open Road”: “Allons! From all formulas” (section 10) and “Allons! After the great Companions” (section 12). Tokin merges the two lines into “Hajdmo iznad svih formula, pođimo sa velikim drugovima” (“Let us go beyond all formulas, let us move along with the great companions”).⁴¹ Tokin starts by looking back to the Reformation, when large numbers of Europeans migrated to the newly-discovered America, which thus became the homeland of all who “sought and wished for the newness which Europe could not give them.” He then argues that Poe, Whitman, and Chaplin are the three figures who “constitute and create the spiritual atmosphere of the innermost America,” and celebrates each in a separate section of the article.⁴² Whitman is depicted as a poet of cosmism, who recognized the great possibilities of America and sang about them, and a poet whose omnipresent poetry makes the invisible more visible and the unseen energies better-known. Tokin presents Whitman as a focal point and transmitter of all human and cosmic forces, conveyed to the readers through his poetry, and he ends this section by equating the poet with the cosmos.

The following year, *Svetski pregled* (*World Review*), another short-lived periodical covering a range of topics in the fields of politics, finance, literature, and art, published Tokin’s article “Four Beginnings of the Modern Poetry—Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Whitman, Nietzsche,” in which the author celebrates the four nineteenth-century figures as the founders of modernity.⁴³ The headline indicates that the article was written to mark the centennial of Baudelaire’s birth, and refers to André Fontainas’s text “Baudelaire,” published in the latest issue of *Mercure de France*. Discussing the free verse as a modern poetic form, Tokin (here under the pseudonym *Aristofan* [Aristophanes]) points to the *vers-libre* poems published in 1886 in two other Parisian magazines, *Revue des deux Mondes* and *La Vogue*, one of which is Jules Laforgue’s translation of Whitman’s “Dedicacé,” i.e., poems from the “Inscriptions” section of *Leaves of Grass*. As Betsy Erkkila points out, Laforgue played a crucial role in presenting Whitman to the French audience and the translations from *La Vogue*, which Tokin mentions here, were “the first official translations of Whitman in France” and had “a far-reaching effect on Laforgue and on the development of *vers-libre* in France.”⁴⁴ Also, quite importantly, Laforgue’s translations “did much to expand Whitman’s reputation among the young *avant-garde* writers with whom Laforgue was associated” (77) and who were most likely Tokin’s friends and acquaintances during his time in Paris. In his article on the beginnings of

modern poetry, Tokin, as a true avant-gardist, states that Whitman's poetry of the cosmos reaches even beyond the Symbolist poetry, while Whitman himself is "one of the most authentic beginnings of the modern epoch of constructions and syntheses" (13). Tokin concludes that whoever does not know what the cosmos is will learn it by reading Whitman, and illustrates his observations with his translation of the poem "O Living Always, Always Dying."

Another of Tokin's texts inspired by Whitman—and a true curiosity among the newspaper articles of the time—was published later in 1921 in the Belgrade daily *Tribuna* (*The Platform*).⁴⁵ Entitled "Walt Whitman in Belgrade," the text includes an imagined conversation with the American poet—encountered while rambling the streets of the Yugoslav capital—in which the narrator (presumably Tokin himself) observes all the changes in the growing city around him: the new buildings and numerous construction sites, the people full of joy and excitement. Near the still unfinished building of the Academy of Science, Tokin notices a "familiar physiognomy" and with wonder concludes that the "gray-haired man with a large white beard and lively eyes" is Walt Whitman. He approaches and addresses the poet, who replies: "There are a lot of people who don't know about me. Why is that? I love everybody—this Belgrade, too." When asked about the reason he came there, Whitman answers that he read in a newspaper about Belgrade being a town with the greatest number of construction sites and, as such towns are of interest to him, he came to see it.

I walk, I am content, and I admire. I've been walking so much that my legs hurt. To be honest, your pavements [...] are in a pretty bad shape. I'm glad to see them being repaired. I'm more interested in the future than the present anyway. And Belgrade has a future. The possibilities are great. (13)

Whitman makes further observations concerning urban planning and erecting new buildings and he particularly admires the wide horizon stretching in the distance between the houses. When they pass the hotel "Moskva," the famous gathering place of the postwar Yugoslav intelligentsia, Whitman is greeted by young writers and artists, all of them his admirers. Tokin's imagined interview is an extraordinary entry in the Serbo-Croatian reception of Whitman: a personal dialogue with the author's American hero with Tokin presuming that, were they to meet, they would certainly share the love for his city. Apart from being a cosmos, an all-encompassing force of powerful expression, in Tokin's view, Whitman is also a man of flesh and blood, interested in the ordinary practical things and eager to communicate with people. And most importantly, Whitman is still very much alive.

While Tokin's texts offer an intimate perspective based on personal impressions and reflecting his avant-garde inclinations, a more comprehensive analysis of Whitman's poetics was presented in 1923 on the pages of the Belgrade magazine *Budućnost* (*The Future*) and this time from a symbolist's point of view.⁴⁶ *Budućnost* was another short-lived periodical, issued from January 1922 to September 1923, and of a rather wide scope, covering a variety of topical issues from agriculture and workers' rights, to the finances, educational and health policies, to urban planning, culture, and literature. The text on Whitman is a translation of an essay written by Konstantin Bal'mont, a symbolist poet, translator, critic, and one of the first Russian promoters of Whitman. Originally entitled "Певец личности и жизни: Уолт Уитман" ("The Bard of Individuality and Life: Walt Whitman"),⁴⁷ the text was translated into Serbo-Croatian by Miodrag M. Pešić, divided into two parts, and published in two consecutive double issues of the magazine. The first part contains Balmont's introductory thoughts on poetry and an observation that the Russian audience has shown a great interest in E. A. Poe but hardly knows anything about Whitman. Balmont attributes this to Whitman's rejection of the European literary patterns, his complexity, the local, distinctly American character of his poetry, and the fact that he wrote only one book, a poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*. In an attempt to emphasize Whitman's significance, Bal'mont proceeds to outline different aspects of Whitman's poetry, among other things depicting Whitman as the poet of the "simple and powerful 'I' of the young race" (719) and "the poet of individuality, endless life, and a harmonic connection between all personal parts and the Cosmic Whole" (728). The essay concludes with a heartening image of free, intelligent people bound together with strings of common spiritual life. Bal'mont illustrates these depictions of Whitman with his translations of several poems (or parts of longer poems), which Miodrag Pešić duly translated into Serbo-Croatian, thus enlarging the corpus of Whitman's poetry available to the Yugoslav readers and offering them a broader picture of the American poet.⁴⁸ This is particularly important considering that *Budućnost* was not a literary magazine, but one dealing with a broad range of sociopolitical issues, which makes its readership far more numerous and diverse.

Not all articles on Whitman's poetry from this period referred to it in affirmative terms. Two of them were quite disapproving of the American poet: Ljubomir Maraković's "Walt Whitman," published in 1921 in the Zagreb literary magazine *Hrvatska prosvjeta* (*Croatian Enlightenment*),⁴⁹ and Bogdan Popović's "Walt Whitman and Swinburne," published in 1925 in *Srpski književni glasnik* (*SKG*) in Belgrade. A literary critic and historian, active in the Croatian

Catholic Movement, Maraković wrote his article inspired by another proponent of Catholicism, Joseph de Tonquédec, a Jesuit priest who would become the official exorcist of Paris and whose text on Whitman appeared earlier in 1921 in a Jesuit journal *Etudes*.⁵⁰ Maraković's article is for the most part composed out of the translated or rephrased excerpts from the French author's text, which offers a rather balanced view of Whitman. The ending, however, is Maraković's own and indicates the Croatian author's not so favorable opinion of Whitman's work; while agreeing with Tonquédec's concluding observations about the power, but also fierceness and vanity of Whitman's poetic soul, Maraković adds that Whitman exerts a powerful influence on the authors of his country partly because "the mentioned foul characteristics of Whitman [...] best suit the evil inclinations of our race and our 'ingenious' poetic generation" (122). Maraković thus used the opportunity not only to present the work of the American poet (and that of his French commentator), but also to express his own opinion, or rather his scorn for those poets who followed in Whitman's footsteps.

A similar approach of voicing one's own disapproval through the words of another author was adopted by the previously mentioned Serbian editor of *Srpski književni glasnik*, Bogdan Popović, whose contribution on Walt Whitman and Charles Algernon Swinburne appeared in 1925.⁵¹ Intending to use Swinburne's essay "Whitmania" (from *Studies in Prose and Poetry*) as a basis for his argumentation, Popović translated or paraphrased a large portion of it, occasionally inserting his own comments to emphasize certain points, and then added four more pages in support of Swinburne's criticism. Apart from discussing Whitman and Swinburne (for the most part, arguing against Whitman and in favor of Swinburne), this text also had a hidden agenda: the author's consideration of these two poets is linked to his attitude towards the latest literary and artistic tendencies and their representatives. Although Popović was generally open to the modern literary ventures, as avant-garde trends became more radical over the 1920s and their proponents became bolder in their public appearances, he began to show less sympathy for their experiments and was sometimes even truly hostile towards them. This was the subtext of Popović's vitriolic denigration of Whitman's poetic style and his personality; denying Whitman any claim to poetic greatness by underlining the primitivism of his style, especially compared to such an aristocratic poet as Swinburne, Popović belittles those who find Whitman's poetry inspiring. According to Popović, people of such humble origins as Whitman's can only grow into "'primitive' people of 'primitive' minds, which is only the twilight of a great morning and a great day; reverting to the primitive urges, primitive forms of work or art, undertaken

by such people, to the primitive, amoral views, manifestations and provocative demonstrations” (106). As the last in a series of four Popović essays focusing on avant-garde figures and phenomena,⁵² this one displays a tested strategy: by discussing Whitman, Popović indirectly attacks the youngest generation of poets and artists, the proponents of the modern poetic expression.

Whitman’s ability to provoke controversial responses in literary circles was noted by Alois Schmaus, a German-born linguist and literature scholar, who moved to Belgrade in 1923 to study Slavistics, Balkan and Oriental studies. In 1926, Schmaus published the article “Walt Whitman or the Song of America. An Excerpt from the Introduction to Whitman’s poetry” in a special section of the Easter triple-issue of the daily newspaper *Reč (The Word)*.⁵³ Schmaus begins his article with comments on the critical reception of Whitman’s work, noting that the poet has been the subject of both praise and derogation and that some, like Swinburne, even changed their attitude from celebrating to attacking him. As the overall conclusion of critics seems to be that Whitman is a truly American poet, independent of European traditions, Schmaus proceeds to give an account of the specifics of the American culture and the European attitude towards it. The author returns to Whitman only in the last part of the article to make his final point:

The enthusiasm of the cultural will, faith, and optimism of America, this is in general the song of Whitman, through which the dithyrambic waves of oceans and vast prairies flow, the roar of big cities, factories, and workshops. It is a song of the joyous passion of a life that always advances, never dies, and that binds together everything in the universe, it is a grand rhythm of life, freed from all the obstacles which diminish its enthusiasm. (4)

These two sentences appropriately sum up the aspects of Whitman’s poetry which appealed to his European readers most and from which, in Schmaus’s opinion, the Europeans could also learn something. Schmaus also observes that Whitman’s name had become a password for the Yugoslav authors and translators who had some limited access to the latest publications issued in the main European cultural centers, in that his name drew their attention to particular pieces of writing, as can be seen from the special case discussed next.

*A Special Case of “Eris” and the Intricacies of
International (Periodical) Networking*

Whitman’s Serbo-Croatian translators and commentators of the pre-World War I and interwar periods focused almost exclusively on his poetry, only occasion-

ally referring to his prose works such as *Democratic Vistas* or the 1855 Preface. These poetry translations seem to have been limited to the Deathbed Edition (apart from Stefanović's translations, as shown above) as almost all the translations were based on the final versions of the poems, which presumably had the largest circulation in Europe. Therefore, it was quite surprising to see that the bibliographies of Whitman's Serbo-Croatian translations included a contribution entitled "Mladenačka pesma iz god. 1844." ("A youth poem from the year 1844"), published in the Bosnian periodical *Narod* (*The People*) in 1923. An even bigger surprise awaited on the actual pages of *Narod*, where I found that the youth "poem" was in fact a prose piece, Whitman's short story "Eris; A Spirit Record," rendered into Serbo-Croatian by a person signed as "K_z" ("K_3" in the Cyrillic script).⁵⁴

This story first appeared in March 1844, in *The Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, entitled "Eris; A Spirit Record" and signed by Walter Whitman. It was revised by the author himself and reprinted under the new title "The Love of Eris.—*A Spirit Record*" in August 1846, in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat*.⁵⁵ The story had very few reprints and was not included in Whitman's selection of his short prose published in *Specimen Days and Collect*.⁵⁶ Importantly in the context of its twentieth-century European reception, it seems not to have been republished in the States after 1860. The Serbo-Croatian translation presents the original version of the story, which can be established not only by the title of the translation, but also by the sentences omitted in the second version. Still, this translation contains enough syntactic and other modifications as well as omissions to suggest that the immediate source was other than the English original.

This was confirmed when my search for possible German translations of this story revealed that one *was* published in the Berlin periodical *Sozialistische Monatshefte* on August 23, 1923, about a fortnight before the text in Serbo-Croatian appeared in *Narod*.⁵⁷ The German translation, by Max Hayek, contains a subtitle "Jugenddichtung, aus dem Jahr 1844" ("A Youth Piece from the Year 1844"), not present in the English original, but, as seen above, also appearing in the Serbo-Croatian version. The similarity of the German words *Dichtung* ("poetry," but also "literature, fiction") and *Gedicht* ("poem") could account for the Serbo-Croatian translator's mistake in rendering *Jugenddichtung* as "mladenačka pesma" ("youth poem") despite the obvious prose structure of the text. The very presence of this subtitle, along with the syntactic modifications which follow the German version and the proximity of the publication dates indicate that the text from *Sozialistische Monatshefte* was indeed the immediate source for

the translation in *Narod*. So what does this tell us about the international dissemination of Whitman's work and more generally about the cultural exchange in the interwar Europe?

Sozialistische Monatshefte, issued in Berlin 1895/96–1933, was a magazine of social-democratic orientation, covering a broad range of different topics, from political, economic, and social issues—many of them related to the currently active socialist, labor, and women's movements—to literature, art, music, science, and philosophy.⁵⁸ As such it was relevant not only for German audiences, but for the socialists around Europe, including those in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. From 1915 to 1924, *Sozialistische Monatshefte* published German translations of Whitman's poems by Max Hayek, the Austrian social-democrat, writer, and journalist, and possibly a familiar name to Yugoslav readers owing to his book-length translations of Whitman's poetry.⁵⁹ *Narod*, the twice-weekly newspaper issued in Sarajevo, featured sociopolitical and economic news and in 1920 launched a literary feuilleton with original contributions from Yugoslav authors, as well as translations from German, French, Russian, and English. The feuilleton was a rare instance of progressive literary endeavors in a city which, for all its prewar potential, was lagging in its cultural development after the war. The same number of *Narod* that published the translation of "Eris" also contains an article on the unequal division of funding for education according to which Bosnia and Hercegovina were allocated the least amount of all the regions in the new Kingdom.⁶⁰

Although postwar circumstances in Sarajevo were not favorable, dedicated individuals strived to keep the pace in literary production and thus continue the work they had started before the war. The periodical *Narod* itself was in many aspects a continuation of the sociopolitical and literary ideas of the Young Bosnia movement and this could account for the appearance of Whitman's short story.⁶¹ Although the identity of the translator signed as "K_z" remains unknown,⁶² all the circumstances related to his contribution suggest that he was following the activities of the European and in particular German socialist circles and possibly the work of Max Hayek. Since Whitman's story was translated from German, and the transcription of the poet's name—"Ualt Uitmen"—was how the Young Bosnians usually transcribed it, I propose that "K_z" could have been one of the former members of the Young Bosnia movement.

Although *Narod* generally displayed no particular interest in spiritualist literature, "K_z" may have decided to translate "Eris" and not some of Whitman's poems (three of which were also published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* earlier the same year) because he specifically wanted to show another side of

the famous poet. It is also possible that only this issue of the German journal was available to him. Whitman's name was enough to grasp the attention of his admirers even if it appeared above a lesser-known prose piece; the fact that Max Hayek translated the story could have been an additional reassurance that it merited attention. But aside from all conjectures, the case of "Eris" confirms that Whitman's reception in the Serbo-Croatian cultural space depended on the enthusiasm of dedicated individuals and that the literary and cultural exchange in interwar Europe relied to a great extent on periodical publications, especially those that were organs of certain artistic or political groups.

Walt Whitman and Social Activism

Apart from authors and critics who celebrated or criticized Whitman from a literary standpoint, there were also those who deemed him relevant in the wider sociopolitical context, with the essays on Whitman and translations of Whitman's poems repeatedly appearing in newspapers dealing with a broad range of issues and some of these essays linking Whitman's poetic expression to his origins, social status, and Americanness. There were, however, authors who felt that Whitman was an extraordinary figure among his contemporaries, even un-American in some respects. In "Walt Whitman: The Greatest American Lyric Poet," published in the Zagreb daily *Novosti (News)* in 1931, Branko Mašić asserts that Whitman as a lyric poet, an apostle-like figure, and a dreamer floating in his own poetic trance, stood somewhat apart from the materialism that prevailed in nineteenth-century American society.⁶³

From 1925 to 1930, several Whitman translations appeared in newspapers across the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, including papers from Niš (South Serbia) and Split (Dalmatia, Croatia), while one was published in a student magazine issued in Trieste (Italy). In 1925 *Niški glasnik (Niš Gazette)*, "an independent, non-party, sociopolitical, cultural, and economic periodical," published a translation of "As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado," rendered into Serbo-Croatian by the journalist Dragi Popović.⁶⁴ In the case of *Jadranska straža (The Adriatic Guard)*, the periodical from Split, the choice of the translated poems was obviously made to match the general topic of the paper; as the organ of the Yugoslav naval organization bearing the same name, *Jadranska straža* promoted the economic and cultural importance of the Adriatic Sea and the two Whitman poems that appeared were "City of Ships" (1926) and "Song for All Seas, All Ships" (1930).⁶⁵ Both translations were made by Živko Vekarić, an avid admirer of Whitman and Anglophone literature generally, whose other

Whitman translation (Section 18 from “Song of Myself”) appeared in 1927 in *Naš glas (Our Voice)*, the monthly magazine of Slovenian high-school students, issued in Trieste.⁶⁶ This last publication contains a short anonymous note on Whitman, describing him as a poet of democratic America and stating that “this former typographer and journalist, of an athletic build, is a universal poet of democracy, joy, strength, and health, and is much read, especially in England and France.”⁶⁷

Živko Vekarić was among the Whitman enthusiasts who from time to time managed to insert a poem or two in the periodicals they worked for and who thus contributed to the southeastern European dissemination of Whitman’s poetry and ideas. In some cases, these individuals were part of a group sharing and promoting ideas on how to improve society to make it more liberal, democratic, and egalitarian. The need for decisive changes in art and culture, exemplified through various artistic movements, reflected wider social concerns, including labor issues and social justice, which eventually led to the rise of radical political groups, both leftist and rightist. A number of intellectuals, writers, editors, and journalists who showed interest in Whitman were also involved in direct political strife and viewed Whitman, along with other frequently translated and discussed authors, as more than a poet of a revolutionary poetic expression—Whitman was a revolutionary personality, whose ideas on the society aligned with their own socialist beliefs.

The Yugoslav socialists’ interest in Whitman was expressed immediately after World War I with the publication of five translations of Whitman’s poems in 1919 appearing in periodicals with a more or less overt socialist agenda. Marko Nani’s translation of “Gods” in *Ilustrovane novosti* appeared under the photo report on the “Great workers’ assembly in Zagreb” held ten days before. Another two translations from this year were published in two communist publications: *Plamen (The Flame)* and *Almanah socijalističke omladine (An Almanac of Socialist Youth)*.⁶⁸ The translator of both poems was Vatroslav-Slavko Cihlar, at the time a member of the Academic Socialist Youth Association and a distinguished Croatian communist throughout the 1920s. Although subtitled “A bi-monthly for all cultural issues,” *Plamen* was mainly a literary organ expressing the communist views of the intellectuals gathered around it, chiefly its editors, August Cesarec and Miroslav Krleža—both left-wing activists—as well as Cihlar himself, who was nominal owner of the magazine. Literary contributions predominate and the only other foreign author in this issue is Nietzsche. The magazine first appeared in January 1919 and was banned by authorities in the summer of the same year after only fifteen issues. The ban imposed on

Plamen prompted the Association of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia to start another publication, *Almanah socijalističke omladine*, of a distinctly leftist orientation and with Marx's slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" on its title page. The publication covered a broad range of topics, and Cihlar's translation of Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" appeared amidst the essays on socialism, workers' rights, the revolutionary proletariat, the role of women in society, and excerpts from the *Communist Manifesto*.

The potential of Whitman's poetry to awake a revolutionary spirit was also recognized by the editors of periodicals with no communist inclinations but representing the opposition to the ruling party. This was the case with Stefanović's previously discussed translation of "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" in the Easter issue of *Republika*, as well as Djuro Banjac's translation of "Starting from Paumanok" (part 12) published in *Beogradski dnevnik (Belgrade Daily)* on January 7, 1920, the day of the Orthodox Christmas.⁶⁹ The fact that this bold and provocative poem appeared on a tradition-bound religious holiday and was placed prominently in the upper half of the third page is not surprising if we look at the content of this number; with its decisive anti-establishment, leftist and democratic orientation, *Beogradski dnevnik* as "an independent organ of public opinion" dartsed harsh criticism at the ruling party and its leaders and aimed to inspire feelings of rebellion and revolt in its readership.⁷⁰ While the Christmas issue does contain a brief note wishing the readers a happy holiday, the next page includes another poem by Banjac, "The Satan," picturing God as a tyrant enslaving people. Banjac himself had been involved in revolutionary activities since his high-school days before the war, as a member of a secret student organization supporting the unification of South Slavs and collaborating with members of the Young Bosnia movement. This connection could well have been the source of his interest in translating Whitman.

According to Ljiljana Babić, in 1921 the Zagreb newspaper *Crvena zastava (The Red Flag)* published an unsigned translation of a Russian text here entitled "Walt Whitman—Boljševik" ("Walt Whitman—a Bolshevik"), written by an unsigned author (15). Unfortunately, I couldn't find a copy of this newspaper, but considering that it was the organ of the League of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia and judging by the title of the article, we can imagine that, as was the case with "Eris," its contributors were browsing foreign communist newspapers and journals for articles relevant for the Yugoslav audience, which included those on Whitman as a figure of interest.

Since the Yugoslav Communist Party was banned in 1921, we can only speculate as to whether Whitman's poetry would have continued to appear

in its periodicals. However, Whitman's poetry was still to be found in other publications of socialist orientation. Another holiday appearance of Whitman in the Yugoslav press occurred in 1925, when *Radničko jedinstvo* (*Workers' Unity*), an "independent workers' newspaper," published an unsigned translation of Whitman's "Reconciliation" on the first page of its May Day issue.⁷¹ The poem pleading for sympathy for the defeated enemy thus found itself among the articles celebrating May 1 and urging the proletariat to cherish brotherhood and solidarity, but also fight against despotic powers. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, scattered articles on Whitman were published in several socialist periodicals in Belgrade and Zagreb, and although their appearance is too haphazard and irregular to suggest any systematic study of Whitman's work and ideas, they point to the fact that he was perceived and read as a poet of workers and social justice.

Another translated text on Whitman appeared in September 1932 in the double issue of the Zagreb magazine *Socijalna misao* (*The Socialist Thought*), a Marxist periodical publishing articles on current political events and social issues (imperialism, war, Hitler's Germany), and covering literary topics (the contemporary Croatian novel, Jack London, Maxim Gorky, and Karl Marx's text on Goethe). In this case, both the author and translator are known: the text was written by Upton Sinclair and translated into Serbo-Croatian by Mirko Kus Nikolajev.⁷² Upton Sinclair was one of the foreign authors whose books were recommended and reviewed in this magazine, and the text, originally entitled "The Good Grey Poet," was taken from *Mammonart: An Essay on Economic Interpretation* (1925), Sinclair's socialist examination of various authors, artists, and composers within the Western canon. Nikolajev, was an ethnologist, sociologist, as well as a social activist and the editor of another socialist periodical, *Crveni kalendar* (*The Red Calendar*), which published a translation of Whitman's *Salut au Monde* in 1934.⁷³ His translation of Sinclair's essay deviates somewhat from the original: some paragraphs are abridged, there are occasional mistranslations, and some parts are translated rather freely. But the overall message is conveyed faithfully; to Sinclair, Whitman was "one of the major prophets—like Dante, Milton, Tolstoi, Nietzsche, who used art as a means of swaying the souls of men."⁷⁴ Sinclair also noted, and Nikolajev translated, that "Walt Whitman did really know the American people, the masses, as distinguished from the cultured few," and that in due time he was discovered by the newly emerging labor movement (254).

The last in a series of the interwar articles on Whitman written in Serbo-Croatian appeared on July 14, 1939, only a month and a half before the start of

the Second World War. In the midst of the reports on the current political crises, the Belgrade newspaper *Radničke novine* (*Workers' Newspaper*) published the text "Walt Whitman," under the headline "The Father of American Modernity," by the Slovenian-American poet, translator, journalist, and political activist Ivan Molek. Founded in 1897, *Radničke novine* became the organ of the Socialist Workers Party in 1919 and was issued until April 1941 and the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia. This 1939 issue focused on celebrating the sesquicentennial of the fall of the Bastille; in Molek's article, readers learned about the shift in American literature after the Civil War and Whitman's dream of the American people and democracy, as well as his scorn for old, imported forms and traditions. Molek himself was well-acquainted with American culture, having spent a large portion of his life in the United States.⁷⁵ Writing on Whitman, the Slovenian author relies on Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* (1919), emphasizing Untermeyer's observation that Whitman is the Lincoln of American literature, who liberated it from British puritanism and opened the door of a modern age. In this particular historical context, Molek's contribution shows that in the face of growing fascist terror, democratic-minded people were striving to promote ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, with Whitman as one of the figures who fortified their endeavors.

Conclusion

The interwar reception of Whitman's work in the Serbo-Croatian cultural and linguistic space rested almost entirely on the translations and articles published in various periodicals. Such dispersion of Whitman-related materials reveals intriguing facts concerning the cultural perception of the American poet. Some of these periodicals were literary magazines, but many were different daily and weekly publications covering a range of current sociopolitical issues. Apart from appearing in the discourse on modern poetry, Whitman was a familiar name in Yugoslav socialist and communist circles; leftist intellectuals saw his poetry as related to a wider social context and reflecting much of their own present circumstances, especially those pertaining to labor issues. The contributors of translations and essays on Whitman were not only journalists, critics, or poets, but also social and political activists, using the public space of the periodical press to voice their thoughts on modern society. If one common denominator could be singled out for all the Whitman promoters of this time, it would be their revolutionary spirit urging them to try and change the existing cultural and political environment. Whitman was perceived as radically unconventional

and—owing to his unorthodox poetic expression and resistance to traditional forms—was greatly admired by supporters of avant-garde movements whose translations and essays contributed to establishing Whitman as an important figure in European modernism and the avant-garde.

Both the avant-garde and socialist groups in interwar Yugoslavia were part of larger European networks, artistic or political, which gave them access to the latest issues of foreign periodicals relevant for their activities. Through these periodicals—French, German, or Russian—they discovered Whitman’s poetry or texts on Whitman, which they subsequently translated or discussed in their own essays. This study of Whitman’s reception has illustrated how the European cultural and intellectual exchange operated in the uncertain and unstable times between the two world wars. The means were limited, but the enthusiasm was great. For his Yugoslav admirers, Whitman was a key figure in promoting modernity in literature and arts, in the organization of a society, and in interpersonal and international relations. They saw him as an American poet transcending the old European patterns and traditions, the poet of democracy and social justice, who could move people because he addressed them directly. In the turbulent interwar years, when both cultural and political life was afflicted by clashes of different factions, the Yugoslav Whitmanites made an effort to promote Whitman through their periodicals, the only medium readily available to them, thus continuing the work of their predecessors and showing how relevant Whitman was for their own generation.

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Notes

- 1 [Anonymous,] “Različite vesti. Sitne vesti,” *Narodne novine* (April 5, 1892) [unpaginated]; my translation.
- 2 Čed. Mijatović, “Pismo iz Londona,” *Otadžbina: književnost, nauka, društveni život* (May 1, 1982), 176; my translation.
- 3 This paper deals with the translations, essays, and articles published in Serbo-Croatian, i.e. the language predominantly spoken in the territories of today’s Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Montenegro. The name and sociolinguistic status of the language (or rather four languages today) have been under dispute due to the political circumstances in the region, but as this is irrelevant for the presented research, I will refer to it as “Serbo-Croatian,” indicating primarily the geographic area on which it was and still is spoken.
- 4 Such was the movement “Young Bosnia,” whose activities were focused on gaining not only political but also cultural independence from Austria-Hungary. Whitman was largely read and translated by the members of this group.

- 5 The first book-length Serbo-Croatian translation of Whitman's poetry was the one by Tin Ujević published in Zagreb in 1951.
- 6 Stephen Stepanchev, "Other Slavic Countries," *Walt Whitman Abroad*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1955), 157.
- 7 Sonja Bašić, "Walt Whitman in Yugoslavia," *Walt Whitman in Europe Today*, ed. Roger Asselineau and William White (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 25.
- 8 Arthur Golden, Marija Golden, Igor Maver, "Whitman in the Former Yugoslavia," *Walt Whitman and the World*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 282–294. Under the sub-heading "Whitman in Croatia," it is erroneously stated that I. Andrić, Lj. Wiesner, and S. Cihlar published translations of Whitman's poems in 1912 in the Zagreb magazine *Plamen*. Andrić's and Wiesner's translations did appear in 1912, but in Sarajevo, in *Bosanska vila*, and Belgrade, in *Srpski književni glasnik*, whereas Cihlar's translation indeed appeared in *Plamen*, but only in 1919.
- 9 Ljiljana Babić, "Walt Whitman in Yugoslavia," *Acta Neophilologica* 9 (1976), 9-58.
- 10 The magazine was first conceived to appear twice a month, on the 1st and 16th. This plan, however, often had to be abandoned due to external circumstances (these were, after all, the final year of the war and the first year of the peace).
- 11 Nenad Ljubinković thoroughly examines the political orientation of *Književni Jug* in "Književni Jug 1918–1919," *Književna istorija* 2 (1969), 371–412.
- 12 Walt Whitman, "Pesme: 3; Kad čitam; Državama," *Književni Jug* (January 1, 1918), 38–39. There is a note indicating the poems were translated from English.
- 13 Walt Whitman, "Chanting the Square Deific" and "To the States," in *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1891–1892). Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (www.whitmanarchive.org).
- 14 Walt Whitman, "Noć na žalu," *Književni Jug* (November 1, 1918), 337–338. Also with a note "Translated from English."
- 15 See Ljiljana Babić, "Walt Whitman in Yugoslavia," *Acta Neophilologica* 9 (1976), 9–58. Bibliographies compiled by Mara Ćurčić (in Volt Vitmen, *Vlati trave: izabrane pesme*, translated by Ivan V. Lalić, Beograd: BIGZ, 1974) and Dragan Purešić (in Volt Vitman, *Izabrana poezija*, translated by Dragan Purešić, Beograd: Plato, 2008) also name Andrić as the translator of these poems.
- 16 Ljubinković, 378. The author makes this statement referring to the "archival records" but he doesn't provide any bibliographic data.
- 17 Andrić's first poetry collection *Ex Ponto* was published in 1918 by *Književni Jug*. His more famous prose works, the novels which would earn him the Nobel Prize, appear much later.
- 18 Ivo Andrić, "Walt Whitman (1819–1919)," *Književni Jug* (August 1, 1919), 49–55. Reprinted in Ivo Andrić, *Prevodilačka sveska: Ivo Andrić*, ed. Jasmina Nešković (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1994).
- 19 Andrić's essay was translated into English by Stefan P. Pajović and published in the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 33 (Summer 2015), 51-60.
- 20 Binns's work was translated into German by Johannes Schlaf in 1907 and, since German publications were generally easier to obtain than the English ones, this translation could have been Andrić's

source.

21 Some of these lines, however, seem to be misplaced. In his discussion of Whitman's first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Andrić's quote from "One's Self I Sing" and the accompanying comment suggest he might not have realized that this poem was not among the original twelve.

22 Anica Savić, "Stogodišnjica Walta Withmana [sic]," *Književni jug* (August 1, 1919), 116–119. Reprinted in Anica Savić Rebac, *Studije i ogledi I-II*, ed. Darinka Zličić (Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, 1988). This text was first delivered as a lecture "in English at the Serbian-French Club at Novi Sad to honour the visit of the American Military Attache."

23 Anica Savić-Rebac translated into Serbian John Milton, John Keats, and her favorite Percy Bysshe Shelley, and into English the long philosophical poem *The Ray of Microcosm* [*Luča mikrokozma*] by the nineteenth-century Romantic poet and Montenegrin ruler Petar II Petrović-Njegoš.

24 In the course of the essay, Anica Savić Rebac will make further observations on America and indirectly point to the postwar European view of the U.S.: "That this compound of democracy and idealism is more than a mere dream of the poet, is proven by America and her history, never before as gloriously as today when the name of President Wilson is mentioned as often as the name of the United States themselves. Therein lies the individualism of democracy, that one powerful personality grows organically out of a whole and should not be externally imposed. And this can be achieved when each particle of the whole is equally and harmonically developed." See Anica Savić Rebac, "Stogodišnjica Walta Whitmana," *Studije i ogledi I-II*, ed. Darinka Zličić (Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, 1988), 321-325; my translation.

25 Savić Rebac, 322; my translation.

26 Walt Whitman, "Bogovi," "Noću, sam na žalu," "Pjesnici budućnosti," translated by Marko N. Nani, *Ilustrovane novosti* (February 16, 1919), 1 and 13.

27 Walt Whitman, "Duše vojnika" ("Souls of Soldiers"), translated by S. Cihlar, *Plamen* (1919), 163–164; Walt Whitman, "Udarajte! Udarajte! Bubnjevi!," translated by Slavko Cihlar, *Almanah socijalističke omladine*, Zagreb: Udruženje Saveza komunističke omladine Jugoslavije, 1919, 45–46. In cases when the title of the translation does not match the original title of the poem (as in *Plamen* above), I will provide the English translation of the Serbian title.

28 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, translated by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 49.

29 Voloder and Miller discuss the participation of the Yugoslav avant-gardists in such interwar networking noting:

Despite their seemingly marginal position compared to the metropolitan centres of France, England, Italy, and Germany, and despite the limited utility of their 'minor' language in communicating their thoughts to an international audience, by the early 1920s Yugoslavian intellectuals had begun to generate the discourse, ideology, venues, and institutions characteristic of other European avant-gardes and were vehemently asserting their place among this international community of artistic revolutionaries. (Laurel Seely Voloder and Tyrus Miller, "Avant-garde Periodicals in the Yugoslavian Crucible," *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. III: Europe 1880–1940*, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, Christian Weikop [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 1099.)

30 Walt Whitman, "Mati svega" ["The Mother of All"], translated by Svetislav Stefanović, *Misao*;

književno-politički časopis (1919–1920), 343.

31 However, the editors apparently showed interest in the history and culture of the United States. In one of the previous numbers, there is a short note announcing the publication of Max Farrand's *Development of the United States* in French translation (published in Paris by Hachette, 1919).

32 Valt Hvitman, "Pioniri! O pioniri!," translated by Svetislav Stefanović, *Republika* (April 11, 1920), 2–3

33 [Anonymous], [Note accompanying the poem], *Republika* (April 11, 1920), 3.

34 The poem's revolutionary potential was detected in other parts of the world, as well. Its reception among the British socialists is discussed in Kirsten Harris, *Walt Whitman and British Socialism: 'The Love of Comrades'* (New York: Routledge, 2016). For the German responses to Whitman's "Pioneers!" see Vanessa Steinroetter, "'Pioneers! O Pioneers!' and Whitman's Early German Translators," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 9 (2009), doi: doi.org/10.16995/ntn.520.

35 Valt Vitmen, "Tužbalica za dva veterana," "Ljubav drugara" ("Love of Comrades"), "Iz Himne povodom smrti A. Linkolna" ("From the Hymn marking the death of A. Lincoln"), translated by Dr. Svet. Stefanović, *Srpski književni glasnik* (November 16, 1920), 420–423.

36 Svetislav Stefanović, ed., *Iz novije engleske lirike* (Beograd: Napredak, 1923).

37 Antun Nizeteo, "Whitman in Croatia: Tin Ujević and Walt Whitman," *Journal of Croatian Studies* 11/12 (1971), 116. Although there are indications that Ujević translated Whitman throughout the 1930s, these translations appeared in print only after World War II and thus will not be discussed in more detail here.

38 See Walter Grünzweig, *Constructing the German Walt Whitman* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 222 n17. Grünzweig further explores the relation between Whitman and Goll in *Walt Whitmann: Die deutschsprachige Rezeption als interkulturelles Phänomen* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1991), 153–154.

39 Tokin mentions Whitman in several of his texts in *Zenit*, but since these are primarily focused on other topics, I will not discuss them here.

40 Boško Tokin, "U. S. A. = Poe, Whitman, Chaplin," *Progres: nezavisan politički dnevnik* (October 22, 1920), 2–4. Tokin's great admiration for Walt Whitman was an inspiration for another Serbian avant-garde author, Stanislav Vinaver. In his *New Panthology of New Serbian Pelengyrics*, a humorous and satirical collection of prose and poetry imitating the style of other authors, the (p)anthologist Vinaver included the text "Walt Whitman's Pantaloons" ["Unterciger Valta Hvitmana"], which refers to Tokin's texts on modern literary tendencies. This was not meant to ridicule Whitman's work, as Vinaver himself revered the American poet considering him an expressionist.

41 The same line is used at the end of Tokin's novel *Terazije*, followed by an explanation: "When it is impossible to be 'a prophet in one's own country', when it is difficult to live with one's own time, belong to one's own generation, then it is a better and perhaps the only solution to go along with the 'great companions'. To follow the path of the great companions. That is to say, to free oneself from anything related to time." (Boško Tokin. *Terazije: roman posleratnog Beograda* (Beograd: Ultimatum, 2015), 202–203; my translation).

42 Boško Tokin, "U. S. A. = Poe, Whitman, Chaplin," *Progres: nezavisan politički dnevnik* (October 22, 1920), 2–3; my translation.

43 Aristofan, “Četiri početka modern poezije: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Whitman, Nietzsche,” *Svetski pregled: politički, ekonomski, finansijski, književni, umetnički* (April 10, 1921), 12–14.

44 Betsy Erkkila, *Walt Whitman Among the French* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 69.

45 Boško Tokin, „Volt Vitmen u Beogradu,” *Tribuna* (November 9, 1921), 2–3. Reprinted in: Boško Tokin, *Veliki planovi*, ed. Ivana Miljak (Novo Mileševo: Banatski kulturni centar, 2015); my translation.

46 Konstantin Dmitriyevich Balmont, “Pesnik ličnosti i života,” translated by M. M. Pešić, *Budućnost* (August 1923), 644–646 and 719–729.

47 Originally published in *Весы (Libra)* 7 (1904) and reprinted in Константин Дмитриевич Бальмонт (Konstantin Dmitrievich Bal'mont), *Белая зарница (White Lightning)* (Saint Petersburg: M.V. Pirozhkov, 1908), 59–84.

48 Translated are the poems “One’s Self I Sing,” “To You” (from *Inscriptions*), “The Dalliance of Eagles,” “I Dream’d in a Dream,” “As Adam Early in the Morning,” “To You” (from *Birds of Passage*), “Beautiful Women,” “To Old Age,” “Mother and Babe,” “A Farm Picture,” “As I Ponder’d in Silence,” “To a Certain Cantatrice,” “We Two Boys Together Clinging,” “This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful,” “Gods,” “Of Him I Love Day and Night,” “On the Beach at Night Alone,” and “Whispers of Heavenly Death.” The quality of these translations, Bal’mont’s and consequently, Pešić’s, is a separate issue. Chukovsky’s criticism of Bal’mont’s translations of Whitman has been discussed in several academic papers (see, for instance, Stephen Stepanchev, “Whitman in Russia,” in *Walt Whitman & the World*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom [Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995], 300–313). Ljiljana Babić pointed to the inaccuracies of Pešić’s translation (although she failed to mention that these could have been caused by the flaws in the source, i.e., the Russian translation). The flaws and inaccuracies, however, do not detract from the significance of these contributions for the foreign reception of Whitman, especially as regards the Serbo-Croatian readership in this specific period.

49 Lj. M[araković], “Walt Whitman,” *Hrvatska prosvjeta* (April 25, 1921), 120–122.

50 Joseph de Tonquédec, “Walt Whitman: un poète de ‘la nature’ aux Etats-Unis,” *Etudes* (January 20, 1921), 190–207. Available online from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34348593d/date).

51 Bogdan Popović, “Valt Hvitman i Svinburn,” *Srpski književni glasnik* (January 16, 1925), 99–109. The essay was written much earlier as indicated by the year at the bottom, 1922.

52 The previous three essays discussed the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, modern art, and African sculpture.

53 Alois Schmaus, “Volt Vitman ili pesma Amerike. Odlomak iz uvoda u Vitmanovo pesništvo,” [“Walt Whitman or the song of America. An excerpt from the introduction to Whitman’s poetry”] *Reč* (May 1–4, 1926), 4. Although the title indicates this is an excerpt from a larger study, I could not find any information that Schmaus wrote anything else on Whitman or American poetry, his main fields of research being the South-Slavic and Balkan literatures and cultures.

54 Ualt Uitmen. “Eris. Istorija jednog duha. Mladenačka pesma iz god. 1844” (Eris. A History of a Spirit. A youth poem from the year 1844), translated by K_z, *Narod* (September 5, 1923), 2.

55 For further information on the publication history of this story see Stephanie Blalock, “About

‘Eris; A Spirit Record’,” available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

56 As Blalock shows, the story was republished in “at least two annual gift books, first in *The American Historical Annual* (1853) and again in *The Lady’s Companion Annual* in 1855,” and, according to Blalock, this makes it unique among Whitman’s short fiction (“About ‘Eris; A Spirit Record’”).

57 Walt Whitman, “Eris. Die Geschichte eines Geistes. Jugenddichtung, aus dem Jahr 1844,” translated by Max Hayek, *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (August 23, 1923), 481–484.

58 More information on the magazine and digitized issues are available on the webpage of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (library.fes.de/sozmon/).

59 Max Hayek translated most of Whitman’s pieces appearing in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, and all of them except “Eris” are poems.

60 See [Anonymous,] “Zapostavljanje Bosne i Hercegovine,” *Narod* (September 5, 1923), 1.

61 See Muhsin Rizvić, *Književni život Bosne i Hercegovine između dva rata* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1980).

62 Signing articles with pseudonyms or initials was a common practice in *Narod*, possibly conditioned by the lack of space. Despite my best efforts to discover the identity of “K_z,” the only thing I can say for certain is that the person was male, which is indicated by the gender-specified verb form preceding the letters.

63 B[ranko] M[ašić], “Walt Whitman, najveći američki lirski pjesnik,” *Novosti* (April 29, 1931), 9. The article is for the most part a biographic overview of Whitman’s life with observations on the poet’s considerable impact on French poetry, as well as on Ivo Andrić. Mašić himself collaborated with Andrić in founding the magazine *Književni Jug* and inserted in this text is Andrić’s 1918 translation of “When I Peruse the Conquered Fame.” Another article on Whitman was published the same year: Stjepan Bebin’s “Iz književnosti nebodera i divljeg Zapada” (“From the literature of skyscrapers and Wild West”), which appeared in the Sarajevo periodical *Jugoslovenska pošta*. This text also seems to regard Whitman in the context of his Americanness, but unfortunately, I can say this only by its title since I could not obtain a copy of this particular number.

64 Walt Whitman, “Kako bejah naslonjen glavom na tvome krilu,” translated by Dragi Popović, *Niški glasnik* (September 4, 1925), 2.

65 “Grad brodova,” *Jadranska straža* (1926), 13; “Pjesma svim morima, svim brodovima,” *Jadranska straža* (1930), 57.

66 Walt Whitman, „Pesma o meni. (Song of My self [sic]),“ translated by Ž. Vekarić, *Naš glas* (April 1927), 119.

67 Anonymous, “Walt Whitman,” *Naš glas* (April 1927), 144; my translation.

68 For complete bibliographic information, see notes 26 and 27.

69 Walt Whitman, “Pesma” (“A Poem”), translated by Djuro Banjac, *Beogradski dnevnik: nezavisni organ javnog mišljenja* (January 7, 1920), 3.

70 In September 1922, the Communist Party Central Committee bought the periodical which thus became its organ.

71 Walt Whitman, “Izmirenje,” *Radničko jedinstvo* (May 1, 1925), 1.

72 Upton Sinclair, “Walt Whitman,” translated by M. K. N., *Socijalna misao* (September 25, 1932), 123–124.

73 This also according to Ljiljana Babić. This periodical was unavailable to me.

74 Upton Sinclair, “The Good Grey Poet,” *Mammonart: an essay in economic interpretation*, Pasadena, CA: Upton Sinclair, 1925, 253–257.

75 To emphasize the socialist connection, I should mention that among the works Molek translated from English into Slovenian is Upton Sinclair’s *Jimmie Higgins*.