

YUGOSLAV LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900-1945: A SURVEY

Kenneth E. Naylor

Introduction

At the turn of the century Slavistics was in its infancy in the United States: it was only in 1898 that Leo Wiener, the first person to be employed to teach a Slavic language—Russian—was appointed to the Harvard University faculty. To the best of my knowledge, there were no regular offerings of any South Slavic language at an American university until the 1920s when Serbocroatian was introduced at Columbia University.¹

Given the interest which the Yugoslav languages and literatures have attracted during the past two decades, it comes as something of a surprise to look back and see that there was little in the way of American scholarly writing about them during the first four decades of this century, i.e. between 1900 and 1945.² In part this apparent neglect can be explained by the fact that the study of the literatures especially was still in its infancy in the Yugoslav lands at the turn of the century. At the same time, I should note that many of the now famous Yugoslav authors who have been the subject of recent intensive study did not begin their literary careers until the second third of this century. A second, and more obvious reason is that there were few, if any, people in the United States who knew the languages outside of a small group of “native” intellectuals, few of whom took an active role in bringing this literature to the attention of a wide public. (Also, there were few grammars available to those in the United States who wanted to learn these languages.) Third, and finally, we may note that the early part of the twentieth century was not a time when there was much interest in the languages or literatures of non-Americans, and the political isolationism of the United States of the period was reflected in a cultural isolationism. Yet, there was an interest in this area and we do find a number of signs which show us that there were precursors to the lively and intense scholarly attention which we now find directed at the languages and literatures of Yugoslavia.

I shall divide this survey into two sections: (1) knowledge of the literatures (folk and belletristic) and the scholarly study of them; and (2) work done on the languages themselves, including grammars and dictionaries, as well as scientific studies along the lines of what we now consider linguistics.

It is difficult for us today to accurately assess the knowledge of or the interest in the languages and literatures of Yugoslavia in the United States in the 1900-1945 period, because we tend to interpret things in modern terms rather than seeing them in the context of their own time. Still, I believe that some patterns can be seen.

For the purposes of this paper, I have used the following criteria for deciding whether a work should be considered as appropriate:

First, the work, if one of literature, was published in English translation. Although there was some publication of works in the languages themselves, it would be foolhardy to presume that there were many outside the “natives” who could, or did, read them in the original.

Second, the work was published in either book form or in a journal (or magazine) which was available in the United States. In this connection, I have included a number of books which were accessible to American readers although published in England.

There is one further problem when we consider the publication and translation of works of the Yugoslav literatures and works about their languages. Of the three modern Yugoslav literary languages, i. e., Macedonian, Serbo-croatian, and Slovene, there was no work done on, and no translations made from, Macedonian, as that language had not yet been codified or recognized—this did not occur until 1944, at the very end of the period under review—and the Serbian, Croatian and Slovene literatures and languages were still in the process of being established in their own country at the beginning of this century.

1. LITERATURE

In this discussion I include both the folk literature which was already well-known and established with a sizable published body of texts in Western Europe from the early part of the nineteenth century, as well as *belles lettres*. The folk literature was the first to become known in the United States.

As early as 1850, samples of Serbian, Croatian and Slovene "popular poetry" were published in a collection of Slavic poetry by Talvj, albeit probably translated from German rather than from the original.³ Otherwise, the early works which appeared in America drew on British or continental sources and in some cases were reprints of works which had appeared in Europe earlier, e.g., those by Manning,⁴ Petrovich,⁵ Stanoyevitch⁶ and Strickland.⁷ Further, it would be hard to establish definitively when books printed in England in the early 1900s made their way (if they did at all) into the hands of American readers. The first original work in the period issued by an American publisher seems to have been the translation of Serbian folk ballads, edited by the pioneering American Slavist George Rapell Noyes, in 1913.⁸

One striking thing about the translations of Yugoslav folk literature is that the preponderance of these works were "Serbian," or so their titles declared. How can we explain this? There are, it seems to me, two reasons: (1) The immense interest which the collection of "heroic songs" which Vuk Stef. Karadžić published had attracted in Western Europe already at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁹ Further, the Serbs has attracted considerable attention with their successful uprising to liberate themselves from the Turks. This is reflected by the special interest in the songs about Kraljević Marko, and the Battle at Kosovo Polje, which are the subject of many of the early translations. (2) The Balkan wars (1912-13) had again drawn the attention of the world, including that of the United States, to Serbia. This interest in Serbian folk songs and literature continued into the middle of the present century, with the collections of Serbian heroic songs made by Milman Parry and Albert Lord.

Given the number of works relating to Yugoslav folk literature,¹⁰ the absence of similar Croatian and Slovene collections of this kind is striking.¹¹ Although we find pieces included in anthologies of "Pan-Slavic" or "Slavonic" fairy tales, they do not come close to matching those called "Serbian."¹² In part this may have been due to the fact that there were no comparable collections of either group's folk songs to match Vuk's in the original.

It is striking, therefore, that while there was major interest in Serbian folk literature, we do not find the same preponderance in the area of *belles-lettres*. Here we see a broader spread in terms both of the literatures and of the individual writers involved. It goes without saying that many of the names which are familiar to us today are absent from this survey because their bearers had not begun their literary activity, and many had not yet been born. Among those whose works were available to America readers in translation by the late 1920s and early 1930s was Ivo Andrić, the first Yugoslav Nobel Prizewinner in literature,

some of whose stories were published in the *Slavonic and East European Review*. (I consider the nature of the media of publication below.)

In considering what would have been known and accessible to an American reader of Yugoslav literature we find that the works by a number of nineteenth and twentieth century writers were available. In the first half of this century, this group included Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Ivan Cankar, Milan Dedinac, Ksaver Djalski, Nikola Drenovac, Jovan Dučić, Vojislav Ilić Jr., Djura Jakšić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, Laza Lazarević, Fran Levštik, Gustav Matoš, Ivan Mažuranić, Branislav Nušić, Dositej Obradović, Petar II Petrović Njegoš, France Prešeren, Milan Rakić, Aleksa Šantić, August Šenoa, Bora Stanković, Ivo Vojnović and Oton Župančić.¹³ Their works appeared in books by various British or American publishers, or in anthologies of European short stories or poetry. A surprising number appeared in the pages of the *Slavonic and East European Review*, the premier British Slavistic journal which was begun in 1922. It is hard to explain why so many of these poems and stories appeared here but, at the same time, it must be noted that this journal was a major outlet for the publication of translations of Yugoslav literatures during the period.

On the other hand, it is interesting that there seems to have been little in the way of serious American literary criticism or literary historical scholarship about the Yugoslav literatures at this time: instead, articles were informative. How can we explain this, given the attention paid to the works themselves? In part this may have been due to the small number of people who knew the Serbocroatian and Slovene languages. Early in the century there were few Americans with a command of Slavic languages in general, and this was especially true for the languages of Yugoslavia. Among those who contributed studies, many bear names suggesting that they were first- or second-generation Yugoslav-Americans. Their interest in the literatures may have grown out of their national pride and desire to make others aware of their national heritage and culture. A striking example of this was the article about the poet Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, published in 1894, by a man better known for his study of electricity than Serbian literature: Nikola Tesla.¹⁴ Two early scholarly studies were authored by Milivoj Stanoyevitch and appeared in the early 1920s: *Early Yugoslav Literature 1100-1800* and *Modern Yugoslav Literature*;¹⁵ the former seems to be the text of his dissertation, defended at Columbia University in 1921. Americans who contributed a great deal to the development of the scholarly study of Yugoslav literatures in this period include Albert Lord, who drew on his field work on the oral tradition with Milman Perry in the 1930s in Serbia and Bosnia to produce several theoretical articles.¹⁶

Of special interest in this context is Anthony J. Klančar, who wrote extensively about Serbian, Croatian and Slovene literature, in articles about various topics and various authors, was an active reviewer of works by Yugoslav writers, and a prolific translator as well.¹⁷ Another person who should be mentioned in this connection is the writer Louis Adamič. Although not a scholar, he did much to draw attention to Yugoslav, especially Slovene, culture with his autobiographical works. Both *My America* and *The Native's Return* made references to Slovene culture and literature, while his collection of Yugoslav proverbs referred specifically to this culture.

Another important early source of information about the literatures of Yugoslavia are the articles and bibliographies published by non-literary scholars. For example, Robert J. Kerner, known for his work as an historian, provided a useful early bibliography about the languages, literatures and history of the "Serbo-Croats and Slovenes" in the 1910s.¹⁸ Encyclopedias published in this period regularly contained articles about various Yugoslav authors and overviews of the literatures, continuing a pattern which existed in a smaller

degree earlier. But far more common than the scholarly articles with which we are now familiar were essays or surveys of Yugoslav literatures; included here are essays by Clarence Manning and George Noyes.¹⁹

Finally, let me say a word about the reviews of original works and of books about the literatures concerned. The American journal *Books Abroad* (now called *World Literature Today*), founded in 1932, early began publishing reviews (many of them by Anthony Klančar) of new Croatian, Serbian and Slovene works. Another source of information about Yugoslav writings was the *Slavonic and East European Review* mentioned above. In a sense we can consider this an "American" journal because it resided temporarily in the United States during the War, between 1941 and 1945; it was from this that the *American Slavic and East European Review* (now the *Slavic Review*) developed after it returned to London. In fact, were I to nominate any journal or magazine as the major source of scholarly information about the literatures of Yugoslavia during the early part of the twentieth century, it would be the *Slavonic Review*, for it was in this way that many works of literature first came to the attention of American scholars. Another important publication was the *American Srbobran*, founded in 1909: it published translations of many folk songs and tales, as well as articles about Yugoslav literature and writers. Its impact was smaller than either the *Slavonic Review* or *Books Abroad* in scholarly terms, but it did a great deal to inform the Serbian community in the United States about Yugoslav literature and culture in the early part of the century.

2. LANGUAGE

In considering American familiarity with, and work in, the languages of Yugoslavia during the early part of the century we find that much less has existed; but, at the same time, I should recall that the beginning of serious American interest in the analysis of any Slavic languages did not really begin until after the Second World War. This growth in scholarship was directly related to the increased American awareness of the languages and peoples of Eastern Europe which the war produced. In the early stages work was almost exclusively of a pedagogical nature, i.e., it often intended to teach the natives English. It was not until the 1950s that we begin to find serious scholarly work on Macedonian, Serbocroatian or Slovene written by Americans.

Because Macedonian was not codified, or formally recognized as an independent language, until 1944, it is not surprising that its study in the United States did not develop until the 1950s. At the same time it would be unfair to ignore the contribution of one American scholar, Horace G. Lunt, whose grammar of Macedonian forms the basis of later scholarship, both in the United States and elsewhere. Lunt also wrote a survey of Macedonian literature in 1953.²⁰

One of the first scholarly works about the Serbocroatian language by an American was published by George L. Trager in 1940.²¹ Although this article, written in the prevailing American structuralist approach, did not play an important role in later considerations of its subject, it is still worthy of mention. Other early works include those by Rajko Ružić, including his dissertation of 1938,²² and Carlton Hodge, which probably derives from his work in preparing teaching materials for the Army.²³ These works are analyses of the modern language, but it is not until much later that we find work in other areas of the Serbocroatian language being undertaken by Americans.

There were, however, practical grammars and textbooks of the language much earlier than the 1940s. John Dyneley Prince published a grammar in 1929²⁴ which was reprinted a number of times, most recently in the 1960s. Hodge's *Spoken Serbocroatian*, part of the

Army language series, was revised and reissued by the Foreign Service Institute in the 1960s.²⁵ We should also note the existence of the dictionary by Francis Bogadek which first appeared in 1915:²⁶ this was most likely the first dictionary available to Americans and is still in use today, although others (both Yugoslav and American) have appeared since.

A similar situation can be found when we examine the materials available for the study of Slovene. I have found no scholarly articles written by Americans during the period we are considering and only one book, a combination grammar and dictionary by V. Kubulka.²⁷ Active scholarly interest in the Slovene language did not begin until the 1950s.

In part, lack of materials to learn the languages explains a great deal about the dearth of scholarly works about these two languages. Also, the arrival in this country of specialists from Europe during and after the war seems to have helped spark interest.

3. OBSERVATIONS

To appreciate the state of knowledge and awareness of the languages and literatures of Yugoslavia in the first half of the twentieth century, we must understand that the seeming "neglect" is due to a number of causes, the most important of which was the general undeveloped state of Slavistics in the United States. It is ironic that the scholarly immigration connected with the Second World War seems to have played an important part in the growth of the discipline. A consequence of the war was that a number of Americans were trained in Serbocroatian, and many of them put their newly-acquired language skills to work after they returned to civilian life. Also, and probably more important, the war brought a number of distinguished European scholars to the United States, where they introduced and nurtured their interest in Slavistics in their new land, establishing through their students the beginnings of a lively and active group of "Yugoslavists."

The period which I have considered here represents that moment before serious and active interest in the study of active Yugoslav languages and literatures began in the United States; a comparable survey for the period beginning in 1950 would present a very different picture.²⁸

The Ohio State University

REFERENCES

1. In addition to the offering of Serbocroatian at Columbia, Slovene was also taught for a period of three years in the 1920s (1922-25) and again in the 1930s (1935-36), see Rado L. Lencek, "Slovene language and literature at Columbia University," *Slovene Studies* 8,2 (1986) 101-03.
2. This can be seen from a review of the information found in the bibliographies of Yugoslav literature in English translation by Vasa Mihailovich and Mateja Matejic, *Yugoslav Literature in English: A Bibliography of Translations and Criticism (1825-1975)* (Cambridge MA, 1976), and the expanded second edition, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Yugoslav Literature in English: 1593-1980* (Columbus OH, 1984). These are invaluable sources of information, which provide a picture of the translations of the literatures of the Yugoslav peoples available to American readers, and of how this has grown over the past four decades. Information dealing specifically with the scholarly work on Southeastern as well as East Central Europe by American scholars in the first part of this century can be found in the articles by William E. Harkins ("Literature"), Alfred B. Lord and David Bynum ("Folklore and Ethnomusicology"), and Edward Stankiewicz ("Linguistics") in Charles Jelavich, ed., *Language and Area Studies: East Central and Southeastern Europe. A Survey* (Chicago, 1969).

3. Talvj was the pseudonym of Therese Albertine Louise von Jacob Robinson, whose *Historical View of the Languages and Literatures of the Slavic Nations, with a Sketch of their Popular Poetry* (New York, 1850) was probably the first natively published work about the Slavs available to American readers.
4. Clarence A. Manning and O. Muriel Fuller, *Marko the King's Son, Hero of the Serbs* (New York, 1932). In this connection I should note the popularity of the songs about Kraljević Marko among English-speaking translators. In addition to the translations of individual songs which have appeared, especially in the *American Srbobran*, I have found two other translations of these songs: David H. Low, *The Ballads of Kraljević Marko* (Cambridge, 1922) and the recently published translation by the late Anne Pennington and Peter Levi, *Marko the Prince: Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs* (New York, 1984).
5. Woislav Petrovich, *Hero Tales and Legends of the Serbians*. Preface by Chedo Miyatovich (London, 1914; New York, 1934).
6. Beatrice Stevenson Stanoyevitch, *An Anthology of Yugoslav Poetry* (Boston, 1920).
7. Walter W. Strickland, *Panslavonic Folk-Lore in Four Books (Translated from Karel-Jaromir Erben's A Hundred Popular Slavonic Fairy Studies in the Original Dialects. . .)* (New York, 1930).
8. George Rapell Noyes and Leonard Bacon, *Heroic Ballads of Servia* (Boston, 1913).
9. The German poet Goethe was said to be much impressed by these songs and the philologist and folklorist Jakob Grimm was moved to learn Serbocroatian in order to read them in the original. He also made a significant contribution to the accessibility of Vuk's grammar with his translations of the grammar of the 1818 *Srpski rječnik* into German in 1824, *Wuk Stephanowitsch's kleine Serbische Grammatik. . .*
10. Collections of this nature include Louis Adamic, *Yugoslav Proverbs* (Girard KA, 1923, 1924) and Julia Chatterton, *Jugo-Slav Folk Songs* (London, 1930), as well as Parker Fillmore, *The Laughing Prince: A Book of Yugoslav Fairy Tales* (New York, 1921). An earlier collection of the same type, Albert Wratislav, *Sixty Folk Tales from Exclusively Slavonic Sources* (London, 1889; New York, 1890), like Strickland's collection, drew on Erben's work.
11. A notable exception to this was the volume of Croatian tales retold by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić (*Priče iz davnine*), which appeared in English translation in London in 1924 (*Croatian Tales of Long Ago*). Some copies clearly reached the United States, as I have one, given by its former owner to his daughter as a birthday gift in the 1920s.
12. In the section in Mihailovich & Matejic on folk literature we find a dozen collections from the period which fit this description and state in their title that they are "Serbian" or are focused on the Serbs, while there are many more songs or stories that appeared in collections or anthologies which have Serbian roots.
13. I have not given the list of works by these authors which were translated and published either in book form or in magazines and anthologies, for reasons of space; full information can be found in Mihailovich & Matejic.
14. This article first appeared in the popular magazine *The Century* and has been reprinted a number of times since, most recently in *The Tesla Journal* 1 (1981) 12-13.
15. Both were published by Columbia University Press. It is worth noting that Columbia was one of the universities which early gave support to the field of Slavic studies in general and South Slavic in particular.
16. Lord began his field work in Yugoslavia in the 1930s, working with Milman Parry on a project related to Parry's theory about the origin of the Homeric songs. Lord continued the work after Parry's untimely death in an automobile accident in 1936. After the publication of a number of scholarly articles related to this material in the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until 1953 when the first two volumes of texts, *Serbo-croatian Heroic Songs*, were published jointly by Harvard University Press and the Serbian Academy of Sciences in Belgrade. In 1951 Lord and the composer Béla Bartók published *Serbo-croatian Folk Songs; Texts and Transcriptions of Seventy-Five Folk Songs from the Milman Parry Collection and a Morphology of Serbo-croatian Folk Melodies* (New York).
17. Anthony J. Klančar presents a prime example of the way a "native son" brought information about the Yugoslav literatures and cultures to the attention of the American reader. With his translations of works, reviews of new works, and articles on these subjects, he was an important figure from the 1930s to the 1960s. For information on Klančar, and a short obituary notice, see the *Society for Slovene Studies Newsletter* 7 (1976) 14, and 9 (1977) 28, respectively.

18. Here I should mention his *Foundations of Slavonic Bibliography* (Chicago, 1916) and "The Jugo-Slavs or the Slovenes and Serbo-Croats," in *Slavic Europe: A Selected Bibliography in Western Languages, Comprising History, Languages and Literatures* (Cambridge MA: 1918).
19. Both Manning and Noyes made contributions as translators as well as writers on the subject of Yugoslav (or South Slavic) literature. Manning's articles include "The Literature of the Southern Slavs," *Comparative Literature Newsletter* 3 (1945), and "The Literature of the Balkan Slavs," T. Strakhovsky, ed., *Handbook of Slavic Studies* (Cambridge MA, 1949), which brought this subject to the attention of a number of people both in Slavic studies and outside. His 1928 article "Yugoslavia" in the *Columbia University Course in Literature* should also be noted. In addition to his introduction to Noyes and Bacon, *Heroic Ballads* (see note 7), Noyes published two major essays. His article "The Literature of the Southern Slavs" in R.J. Kerner, ed., *Yugoslavia* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1949) and his introduction to the translation of the *Life and Adventures of Dositej Obradović* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1953) provide basic information about nineteenth- and twentieth-century, as well as earlier, Serbian literature.
20. *A Grammar of the Macedonian Literary Language* (Skopje, 1952); unfortunately, though long out of print, this has never been reprinted; and "A survey of Macedonian literature," *Harvard Slavic Studies* 1 (1955) 369-96.
21. "Serbo-Croatian accents and quantities," *Language* 16 (1940) 29-32.
22. *The Verbal Aspects in Serbo-Croatian*, PhD. Diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1938, published as *The Aspects of the Verb in Serbo-Croatian* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1943).
23. "Serbo-Croatian phonemes," *Language* 22 (1946) 112-21.
24. *Practical Grammar of the Serbo-Croatian Language*. First published in Belgrade when its author was serving as Minister to Yugoslavia, it was reprinted in the United States a number of times, most recently in 1966.
25. *Spoken Serbo-Croatian* (1945), prepared for the United States Armed Forces Institute. In 1965 the Foreign Service Institute published *Spoken Serbo-Croatian: Basic Course, Units 1-25*, which Hodge prepared with J. Jankovic.
26. Francis Bogadek, *New English-Croatian and Croatian-English Dictionary* (1915), contained a grammar of English and a guide to correct English pronunciation; repub. as *Najveći hrvatsko-angleski i anglesko-hrvatski rječnik* (Pittsburgh, 1917), with the same supplements. These show that it was intended to help Croatians with English, rather than Americans with Serbocroatian. Later editions appeared in 1926, 1944, 1945, 1949, 1954.
27. *Slovenian-English Grammar, Slovenian-English Interpreter and English-Slovenian Dictionary* (New York, 1909, 1912).
28. An example of the degree of breadth of American research on Yugoslavia in linguistics can be seen in the data in Edward Stankiewicz and Kenneth E. Naylor, "South Slavic linguistics in the United States: 1966-1976," *Balkanistica* 4 (1977) 149-72.

POVZETEK

JUŽNOSLOVANSKI JEZIKI IN KNJIŽEVNOSTI V ZDRUŽENIH DRŽAVAH, 1900-1945: PREGLED

Članek vsebuje pregled gradiva—knjig in člankov—ki je bilo na razpolago ameriškim bralcem v času od 1900 do 1945 o književnostih in jezikih Jugoslovancev in vpliv tega gradiva na širši krog intelektualcev.

