

## **Young Bosnia: Literary Action 1908–1914**

**Abstract:** Literary work and criticism was a significant aspect of the public activity of the short-lived Young Bosnia movement, but an aspect which has been unjustly neglected in historiography or overshadowed by the political aspect marked by the struggle for national liberation. Much as the movement was unstructured, contradiction-ridden and often uncertain whether to give precedence to the ethical or the aesthetic dimension of literature, its openness to the pace-setting European cultures gave an impetus to laying the literary and intellectual groundwork for the modernization of not only the local literary scene in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also of the shared cultural space in interwar Yugoslavia.

**Keywords:** Young Bosnia (*Mlada Bosna*) movement, literary work and criticism, cultural modernization, national liberation, Yugoslav idea

The first certain signs of a literary revival, spurred by the work of members of Young Bosnia in the period between the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1908) and the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1914), were observable in the new generation's critical attitude towards literary tradition. At first, the Young Bosnia literati, still lacking sufficient intellectual freedom and literary education, went no further than criticizing the local literary situation. Later on, having left their high-school classrooms and illegal literary clubs for Zagreb, Belgrade, Vienna, Prague, Krakow, Graz, Geneva, Lausanne, Paris and other European universities, they came to feel confident enough to embark upon critical reassessment of the Serbian and Croatian literary heritage. Dissatisfied with Bosnia-Herzegovina's insular literary regionalism, they required of local writers to meet the standards set by the most distinguished Serbian and Croatian critics of their times. In that way, they put the local literary production, which Serbian literary criticism tended to treat too leniently for national and political reasons, on an equal footing with the work of other Serbian and Croatian writers.

Aware that some tidying needed to be done from the outset, they approached the task of reassessing the literary situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina almost in unison, as if following a defined programme. "To put together a synthetic overview would make sense and whoever embarks upon providing a reliable overview of the kind will have to be an enterprising man, because there will be difficulties to overcome along the way. Something ought to be said about our reading public, their needs and demands — i.e. if amidst

this state of affairs and strife in social and political life there is such a thing as our reading public at all. Regrettably, we do not operate in a centralized way in our literary work; the question of magazines needs to be thrashed out: what we need there, and what we do not; finally, one should identify our Serbian national imprint in our literary products and then detect the influence of the milieu and find a distinctly Bosno-Herzegovinan imprint, a reflection of our pitiful political and educational situation.”<sup>1</sup> What the Young Bosnia writers saw as a distinctive feature of the Bosno-Herzegovinan milieu in Serbian literature was primarily the moral strength of the enslaved and destitute people. One of their fundamental critical demands in assessing the literary situation therefore was for literature to turn to life itself with more audacity and immediacy and to portray the state of society, social relations and people’s misery as they really were.

Initially, not even Petar Kočić’s literary work was radical enough to them. “Without the intention to suggest recipes,” Dimitrije Mitrović writes in his first widely noticed article published in *Bosanska vila* in 1907, “I assert that we haven’t got a strong realist narrator capable of creating an artistic synthesis of our life and milieu.”<sup>2</sup> Another prominent member of Young Bosnia, Vladimir Gaćinović, articulates this demand even more explicitly in his first ever published text (late 1907). In his view, only this consistently realist orientation can help resuscitate literature, until recently contenting itself with national pathos and shallow folklorism permeated with naïve didacticism. “Witnessing the transitional stage of our dumb-founded society, emphasizing a surge of modern ideas, discerning a wide-ranging evolution of our life, sensing the depatriarchalization of the common man, we can see that our short story is blinkered and stunted, that not even amidst so many publications do we have portrayal of social misery and destitution, of the complicated struggle of social elements and groups, of the wretched husbandman squealing and crying amidst his misery and poverty.”<sup>3</sup>

In elucidating the causes of that spiritual and artistic sluggishness, the young tended to rely on what then were very modern aesthetic theories launched by European positivists and social determinists. Seventeen-year old Gaćinović, even as a high-school student familiar with, say, H. T. Buckle’s *History of Civilization in England*, embraced early on the deterministic view that “work towards civilization is determined by the economic position.”<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> Dimitrije Mitrović, “Nas književni rad”, *Bosanska vila* XXII (1907), No. 8, 120–122; No. 9, 138–139; No. 10, 153–154; No. 11, 169–170.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Gaćinović, “Pripovjetke Petra Kočića”, *Ogledi i pisma* (Sarajevo 1956), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Gaćinović, “R. T. P. Nevesinjski: *Gorštakinje i Iz zemlje plača*”, *ibid.*, 32.

is from this simplified standpoint that he explains the shortcomings of earlier Bosno-Herzegovinan writers: "In the old times there prevailed among our critics the misconception that our society was undeveloped, primitive, our social organization simple, unvaried, that we lived poky, puny, petty lives, that none of that could provide material for a broader portrayal of the feverish nervousness of our age. But nothing is closer to romanticism than that unfounded and dishevelled claim. The reason for the shortage of such literary work should be looked for in the lack of more generous, broader-minded talents, which is determined by the fertility and composition of the soil. That is where lies the root of the unrealness of our short story (in Bosnia), of the absence of modern-day nervousness and restlessness, of the dread and mistrust of novelty. There is no gradation of passions in it, no evolution of a more active life, no decomposition of the sacrosanct dogmas that for centuries have stifled free, unhindered development, repugnantly criticizing any change in views, notions or ways of life. There are no complicated problems in it, social, political, economic, no exhaustive account of the shifting understanding of truth, above all there is no imprint of an agitated land [...] there lack images of that beastly wolfish struggle where moral considerations give in to basic self-interest, where altruism is a fairytale and the *ought to* moral principle is being trampled upon. There is no power of understanding and drawing character, and that most of all reflects the diletantism of most our story writers."<sup>5</sup>

With the exception of Petar Kočić, "predisposed to becoming a broad, open, steady poet and analyst of the soul of his miserable and dejected characters",<sup>6</sup> Gaćinović expresses strong disapproval of superficiality, primitivism, folklorism, crude observation, sentimentality and pathos, hollow phraseology, lack of mastery of the literary craft, flawed composition, inflexible narrative and an excess of patriotic rhetoric, sweet dreams and airy ideas, and does not hesitate to use the example of the most prominent and most popular local writers of his time to demonstrate his dissatisfaction and strictness. Thus Svetozar Ćorović, "in spite of all his artistry and subtle observation", unforgivably "fails to produce exhaustive, incontestable analyses of his many heroes' social torments and predicaments".<sup>7</sup> Radovan Tunguz Perović Nevesinjski, on the other hand, is harshly criticized for his lifeless and unconvincing writing, the kind of literature "born out of those nervous years of our national romanticism when, with raw, crude enthusiasm, amidst slushy, painful dissection and chatter, poetic declamation and national 'awakening', 'a certain hour' was awaited with eager impatience,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 32–33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 33.

amidst the inebriated, quite fanciful, expectation of the imminent fulfilment of the Serbian pledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Trueness to life was Gaćinović’s ultimate criterion, but even as a beginner in literary criticism, he formulates quite clearly and precisely the demand that a literary work, much as it contains a sum of realistic elements, ought to be art, whereby he unambiguously condemns the dilettantism and primitivism in shaping a literary work typical of many earlier prose writers in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Nevesinjski, for example, he observes “countless errors, syntactic and punctuational, logical absurdities, folkloric observations, misperceptions, deficient knowledge. The few full and polished descriptions cannot make up for superficiality, for the shortcomings coming from a lack of artistic quality, finesse, composition. The tendency of the story is clear and not really off-putting, but its substance, sap, essence, is on a very low artistic level”.<sup>9</sup> While allowing for the possibility that some objective circumstances and financial difficulties may have compelled the writer to publish unfinished and unpolished works, Gaćinović believes that the effort towards a cultural revival cannot bear fruit until literary works become truly artistic; that only soundly, maturely and masterly written works can fulfil the task that life itself assigns to the new Bosno-Herzegovinan literature.

Mitrinović, an accurate and astute observer even at the age of twenty, very perceptive in spotting new and promising literary trends and suggestive in writing about them, goes further than Gaćinović in his reappraisal of the cultural legacy. Unlike Gaćinović, he is unwilling to excuse even Petar Kočić, otherwise enthusiastically received by Young Bosnia, for his excessive tendentiousness which, in Mitrinović’s view, tends to disrupt the smooth flow of Kočić’s narrative.

Aware that Kočić’s bold insight into the living reality of society has the potential to enrich Bosno-Herzegovinan prose with a consistently realist creative strain, he finds that this type of authors have no trouble finding subject matter for their writing. “There is much more dire material for a story, if not for a novel, and there is no doubt that Mr. Kočić will be able to give it a literary shape in his powerful and impressive stories set in Bosanska Krajina. My only fear is that he might lose himself in politics and publicistics, an activity that will certainly be detrimental to his writing.”<sup>10</sup> His fear was justified, as two years later Jovan Skerlić felt compelled to suggest to Kočić: “Give up politics, it’s something anyone can do, and do literature

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mitrinović, “Naš književni rad”.

instead, at which you are second to none in our country,"<sup>11</sup> a piece of advice Kočić was not willing to take, though. Predicting the dwindling of Kočić's narrative powers at the time the latter was engaged in starting the magazine *Otadžbina* (Fatherland), Mitrinović, with the self-confidence of a natural critic, spotted a nascent trend which soon became reality in Bosno-Herzegovinan literature in the first decade of the twentieth century. Briefly, even in his early literary critiques Mitrinović showed the ability to catch the drift of what was going on in modern literature, which makes his assessment of the literary situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the eve of the Annexation published in *Bosanska vila* an exceptionally important document not only for understanding the attitude of the Young Bosnia writers towards literary tradition but also for understanding the role of Mitrinović's criticism in the youth-led literary action on the eve of the First World War.

Mitrinović's text in *Bosanska vila* offers not only a general picture of the literary trends and developments, but also succinct evaluations of the production of some writers. Apart from Kočić, for whom he has much sympathy in spite of all reservations and doubts, Mitrinović sketches literary portraits of Svetozar Ćorović, Radovan Tunguz Perović Nevesinjski, Aleksa Šantić and Jovan Dučić, and offers terse evaluations of the work of Avdo Karabegović Hasanbegov and Osman Djikić, Muslim writers self-declared as belonging to Serbian literature. Setting his aesthetic criteria relatively high, Mitrinović makes no concessions, as opposed to politically more mature, determined and practical Gaćinović.

It is a fact that Mitrinović's judgments authoritatively put forth in the first ever critical overview of Serbian literature in Bosnia-Herzegovina have generally stood the test of time. In his view, Svetozar Ćorović "lacked self-criticism, taste and keen observation: through writing, he has built himself up, found his style and his way. He has not attained literary finesse yet, but he has certainly accomplished all that is required of a good narrative writer and largely deserves the favour he enjoys among critics and the outside public." Nevesinjski, on the other hand, "has no taste for realistic portrayal of contemporary life and prefers motives where he can allow free rein to his imagination." Šantić is "not as rich, sumptuous and emotional as Mr. Dučić, nor is he as elegant and balanced as Mr. Rakić. [...] Many of his poems do not possess real value, some do not possess any value at all, and almost none is balanced, rounded-off, perfect. [...] Mr. Šantić is not an artist in the narrow sense of the word; he shows little resemblance to Vojislav [Ilić], who has been his inspiration, and has almost nothing in common with the pure art of poetry, such as, for example, Mr. Milan Begović; he is not a master, nor

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<sup>11</sup> Jovan Skerlić to Petar Kočić, 16 August 1909, published in vol. II of Petar Kočić's Collected Works (Belgrade 1961), 354.

is he purely aware of his poetic creation. Hence come two things. To polish, balance, perfect is what Mr. Šantić cannot do, because he lacks the necessary self-criticism and spiritual culture, and will not do, because that contradicts his own poetic nature and his principles of creation. On the other hand, his poetry has a very likeable intimacy to it, a sincerity, openness of the soul; it appears obvious that most of his poems are born out of necessity and the unconscious, that their creator is a poet.”

Mitrinović's sober appraisal of Jovan Dučić, although put forth in the casual manner typical of impressionist criticism, contains many elements of an objective interpretation of the poetry whose impeccable style even then received an enthusiastic response from critics and the reading public alike. “Nowadays Mr. Dučić is a poet of finesse and elegance, a graceful artist, authentic, a fully conscious mind; so, all desirable qualities are there. But nowadays there is not enough soul or impression in his conscious pieces; the conscious mind is too visible, [...] nor is there the profound emotion and spontaneity of the earlier Dučić. To me, there are two Dučićs in one person; I love the earlier, and respect the later. Susceptible to Western influences to an incredibly large extent, Mr. Dučić has over the years become French, and it looks nothing like a Herzegovinan Serb ennobled by the Romanic spirit. By his nature Mr. Dučić is a passionate man, a hot-blooded Southerner; he is flamboyant, intense, wild, a fantasist, almost always in a state of heightened emotion. Originally, he was a romantic. At first strongly influenced by Vojislav's poetry, albeit without much harm to his own poetry, he found his way, only to lose it again when he went off to the West. There came parnasists, decadents, symbolists, and changed the man, a metamorphosis that did him neither much good nor much bad. There is in our present-day poetry preciousness, insincerity and absurdity, but there is also careful wording, concern with technique and form; there is a striving for art, the repertoire of motifs is expanding; there is a striving for something new, something freer! We are beginning to modernize, and that is good.” Mitrinović's critical perceptivity is obvious both from his disapproval of Dučić's affected elegance as being unsuited to the poet's Mediterranean temper, and his acknowledgment that Dučić's lyric poetry nonetheless expands the field and possibilities of poetic expression. He further develops and concretizes Skerlić's judgement,<sup>12</sup> modifying it so to suit the notions and ideas of the youth who saw Dučić primarily as a bridge towards the pace-setting cultures.

This emphasis on Dučić's credit for modernizing Serbian poetry in the early twentieth century foreshadows the bold creative steps that the Young Bosnia literati were about to take. Indeed, within a short span of less than ten years they left behind them Dučić's parnasist models and

<sup>12</sup> Jovan Skerlić, “Jovan Dučić: Pjesme”, *Letopis Matice srpske* CX (1901), No. 6, 77–86.

turned to more modern poetic achievements. Gaćinović's text "A Serbian modernist"<sup>13</sup> testifies to that perhaps even more clearly than the judgment Mitrinović cursorily passed upon Dučić. Sterner and more rational than Mitrinović, a practitioner, revolutionary and organizer of clandestine youth groups, a conspirator whose literary ideas were basically pragmatic and who saw art primarily as an instrument of political action, never failing to emphasize how important for a literary work was to have a social and national tendency, Gaćinović assesses in his own way the far-reachingness of Dučić's getting closer to the spirit of the European poetic imagination and hails his modernism as a chance for a national literary revival.

Gaćinović's emphasis on aesthetic value in his interpretation of Dučić's work is in fact a call in support of the spiritual revival concept, a concept that Young Bosnia was soon to adopt and develop as one of the fundamental literary and intellectual principles of their vitality. "While the generations of the previous literary epoch contented themselves with ethereal and empty figures, this generation, under the influence of French, English, Italian, Russian and German cultures, comes up with more complex and more artistic stuff, at moments equalling those of civilized nations in strength and height. [...] Literary conservatives point their finger at the young people's departure from tradition. The new poetry might just as well be considered a curse and denationalization. [...] But this generation will not give another Mr. Košutić, which means the triumph of modernity and sound writing. Revitalizing their people morally and aesthetically, removing all darkness and coldness from present-day society would be a direct result of these young people's triumph. That would be the fulfilment of the moral and social reform of our society."<sup>14</sup> Interpreting Dučić's poetry as the materialization of the temperamental poet's emotional and intellectual potentials, Gaćinović sees in his rhythmical verse imbued with the classical, pagan, spirit, not only "the sparkling of a rich intellect, the sensual and spontaneous pulsation of the nerve of a strong and living man", but also an attempt at democratization by a "delicate temperament that can sense melody and harmony even in the dullest and crudest little thing" and "in his tragicness emerges proud and tall in these petty times".

The belief that, by following Dučić's example of ennobling the national spirit by the achievements of modern culture and civilization, a small and contradiction-ridden literature would more easily and more quickly become able to catch up with larger and more fortunate cultures was the driving force of the Young Bosnia literary endeavour. A good part of the movement's literary work transcended its epoch and environment. Amidst

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<sup>13</sup> Gaćinović, *Ogledi i pisma*, 38–42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

the deep darkness of provincial bigotry, spiritual and material poverty, largely isolated from major literary and cultural centres, it nonetheless made an outstanding effort to catch up with the trends and achievements of modern literary thought and in that way paved the way for the introduction of fresh ideas in twentieth-century Serbian and Croatian literatures. By breaking up with literary tradition and promoting modern views of literature, the Young Bosnia literary movement pioneered progressive literary thought. They struggled to widen the narrow door to let in the light they craved, and in their wake, new generations, neither knowing nor acknowledging the pioneers, were able to create a new and emancipatory tradition in Serbian literature.

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Young Bosnia's critical reassessment of the regional literary tradition and its attempt to introduce some new evaluation criteria for a literature which often tended to compensate for its artistic unevenness by overemphasizing the national tendency was the beginning of a creative and critical ferment of ideas on Bosnia-Herzegovina's literary scene. In opposition to the obsolete concepts of outmoded insular nationalism, conservative patriarchal dogmatism and primitive populism, which, in the art of literature, were reflected in the older generation's stubborn insistence on local colour, ethnographic ornament and the lexical treasure of a "pure" vernacular, the younger advocated spiritual emancipation, European standards and the creation of a new intellectual climate on the premises of civic liberalism. Their interest is not confined to local literature; they increasingly and more specifically take a stand on literary developments in Belgrade and Zagreb as the centres of Serbian and Croatian literatures, and demand that our literature venture beyond the narrow confines of overemphasized romantic nationalism and to grow attuned to the progressive, democratic spirit of free artistic creation entirely focused on man and the human condition. This identification with Western literary and intellectual movements and the espousal of a modern perspective on creative practice could not, however, neutralize the national character of Serbian literature, because the principle of modernity was not at odds with the basic conceptual orientation of Serbian and Croatian literatures. On the contrary, it was their new, promising and as yet unexploited possibility, a possibility that was to be embraced and exploited. The national criterion, therefore, could not be a criterion for universal literary value; the individual and subjective was to be emancipated, because the notion had become definitively accepted of art as having not only a historical, cultural and national significance, but also an aesthetic one, hitherto largely neglected.

The loudest and most persistent champion of such conceptions from among the Young Bosnia writers was Dimitrije Mitrinović, one of the most



important, most dynamic and most influential figures of the youth movement before the First World War, a critic and poet rightfully considered by the Young Bosnia writers as a reliable authority on literature and art, a man whom Skerlić described as “one of the leading ideologists and best writers of our young generation”.<sup>15</sup> “There is a view,” Mitrinović wrote in 1908, “that the modernization of our society and our literature brings defeat upon our people, our individuality and our national ideals, but the view is incorrect. We can modernize and cultivate ourselves and yet, thank God, remain alive and well; our literature can open to a strong influence of modern Western literatures, and yet remain our, Serbian, literature; a work can bear a full imprint of the individuality of the people in whose midst it has originated and yet be perfectly modern. [...] Our epoch is marked by individualism and liberalism, this is the age of craving the vigour and fullness of one's own individual life, our art is essentially the art of self, personality, subjectivity. And that must not be ignored. Small and weak as we are, we must fight versatilely and persistently for our survival in the organism of nations, using all means in the process; we are allowed to borrow. We must not be insensitive to the lush and versatile life of the modern and strong West because, if uncultured and unmodern, we shall be overrun by the force of that strong and lush West's culture. But in looking up to and borrowing from the West, we should not become denationalized; we should become fertilized. Foreign influences should be nationalized, modified to conform to our capacities and circumstances, and only that in the foreign which is cosmopolitan and universal enough should be embraced in order that it might blend well and naturally with our national soul.”<sup>16</sup>

Taking into account potential resistance to his outlook and aware that it might be maliciously misinterpreted as a form of the very unpopular national and cultural policy of Austria-Hungary which justified its presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina by its civilizatory role, Mitrinović sets out to define what national literature and its nature are. Using a reasoned and documented critique of primitive nationalism and interpreting the basic humanist tenets of modern art, he seeks to divert the course of literary development and encourage the acceptance of new aesthetic and moral values.

According to his views put forth in the article “National soil and modernity”, predicated on a deliberately simplified positivist aesthetics, literature is “national only if it is a sincere, genuine, expression of the national soul; the expression may take whatever form, but it must be sincere. And

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<sup>15</sup> Jovan Skerlić, “Novi omladinski listovi i novi naraštaj”, *Srpski književni glasnik* XXX (1913), No. 3, 212–224.

<sup>16</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, “Nacionalno tlo i modernost”, *Bosanska vila* XXIII (1908), No. 19, 289–290; No. 20, 305–307.

if a literary product, whatever its form, is sincere, it is national. Hence, any trend in art is national if its starting point is in the soul of the people and in its own times. And since differentiated individuals, as an organized whole, constitute a nation, the sincere desires, sincere joys and sincere, genuine, heartfelt woes of those individuals constitute the material for the *national* literature of the nation. [...] And any product of art that is created sincerely and inspired by the spirit of the times is not only national, it is modern as well.”<sup>17</sup>

Taking the short story as a typical example of outmoded and inappropriate folklorism, Mitrinović correctly observes that its tendentiousness has an adverse effect on its literary value, the same as the perpetuation of hackneyed poetic conventions stifles all freer breath and all personal touch. “A good part of the contemporary and a vast part of the earlier short story has little to do with art! A vast majority of our story writers are not artists, but ethnographers of an odd sort, collectors of folk traditions, and the exact portrayal of what is specific, local, unessential is the best they can do. [...] Our short story features people from all Serbian lands, and yet, almost no *man* from any part of Serbdom famed, perhaps even overfamed, for its folk poetry and artistic instinct. Enumerating and quoting examples of this misfortune of ours is of no use, nor is it a pleasant thing to do. Is there any person of taste and culture who could say that most of our short stories have literary value and that this disaster is not a disaster at all, but rather our pride and joy? To add to misery, the same goes for most of our poetry as well. It is not ethnographic, that is true, but then again, it is too unfree and clichéd; it lacks soul and freedom, and has too many poor verses and a diluted objectivity. It is only our modern poetry, the one since 1900, that offers in its products a sense of self, soul, freedom, art. Our good Zmaj [Jovan Jovanović], who stood unswervingly on the national soil, [...] which, however, was too national, too political and too belligerent, could not create the work which his gift undoubtedly allowed him to create. He may be labelled *our* and *Serbian* great poet, that is true, only that the *our* and *Serbian* is not a universal value criterion, the only criterion that matters. Unfree and untrue to himself, Zmaj has a historical, cultural and national importance. But this dragon nightingale can tell us little about *himself* and *his* soul, about *his* inner being and *his* worldview.”<sup>18</sup>

Mitrinović’s emphasis on the poet’s freer expression of his inner self indicates what the new nature of national literature should be: the more ethically motivated, more present and more involved in its own times and environment, the more responsive to the requirements of art and artistic cre-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ation it is, the more contemporary and progressive it becomes. This emancipation from conventionalities and dogmatism will help it become attuned to modern literature and to the spiritual climate of its times and boost the cultural advancement of the nation. "Modernity is not stagnant or absolute or one, just as morality is not absolute and one; it is relative and subject to all manner of change. He who takes part in the spiritual ferment of an age, who can feel its mood and is living in it, can rightfully claim the label of modern man. And, since being contemporary means being able to make life's deals and to have a life, being modern does not mean being godless, insolent, aloof and exotic. Being unmodern is being uncontemporary, and whoever is outside his times is unable to provide for his living conditions and to live his life to the full. [...] Today, modern is the one who feels all this chaotic effervescence of most contradictory and most paradoxical outlooks and systems, all this nervous, quivering, disorderly and hazy atmosphere of our transitional and, perhaps, outstandingly important epoch. Being unconcerned with the current issues of science and social life, staying unmoved and unexcited by the new aspirations of the liberated and confused human spirit means being unmodern and uncontemporary; moreover, unworthy of life. [...] *Man in all places and times* — that is the subject matter of art, its foremost and eternal subject matter; man with his mysterious, indecipherable, and essentially unchanged, psychic constitution, with his small and great joys and sorrows, love and hate, madness and despair, his angelical and divine goodness and beastly and diabolic wickedness, with his lies, deviousness, countless most diverse and weirdest states of mind. What is essential and eternal in man, what makes man human is the subject matter of true and great art. Everlasting works of art are those that depict that which is essentially human, from happiness and sorrow that are to happiness and sorrow that are not, that dwell in human dreams and hopes. That which is specific to a people and a person is irrelevant. And the art that depicts only, or predominantly, that which is specific to a single man, without showing what that particular man has in common with all other men is a miserable art or not art at all."<sup>19</sup>

The humanist principles, which Mitrinović formulates as essential properties of modern art, largely explain the ethical nature of his aesthetics. Activism, dynamism, sincerity, sensibleness, humanity and full awareness of the interconnection and interaction among spiritual movements and cultures are the essential qualities of modern art, which can accomplish its mission and fulfil its ethic and aesthetic purpose only if it is free and independent. Mitrinović's text "National soil and modernity" was the first more serious literary and critical programme of the young generation of Bosno-Herze-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

govinan intellectuals. Boldly embracing many progressive literary ideas of their times, they challenged the established mindset of their patriarchal, nationally oversensitive and conservative environment. Even the earliest stage of their activity, in opposition to their fathers and their moral standards, in opposition to the established literary values, foreshadowed their revolutionary mindset, resolve and consistent radicalism.

Although their aesthetic outlook was largely dependent on radical individualism and on civic liberalism, which had been gaining momentum in European culture, paving the way for the avant-garde movements that were to arise during and after the First World War, the Young Bosnia writers did not fail to notice certain developments within national literature. Fully aware of the already obvious outcomes of the literary rebellion fomented by the Croatian modern movement, whose aesthetic interventions had helped legitimize the merciless criticism of outdated views and values, they embraced the idea of fruitful contact with Europe and the principle of creative freedom, boldness and individualism. On the other hand, they kept close track of what was going on in Serbian literary criticism, borrowing all that was compatible with their radical standpoint. Nedić's critique of the dilettantism and spiritual poverty of widely celebrated Serbian poets,<sup>20</sup> elements of Bogdan Popović's aesthetic doctrine of literary style and taste,<sup>21</sup> immediate echoes of Jovan Skerlić's democratism based on a positivist interpretation of art,<sup>22</sup> all that blended in the texts of Young Bosnia writers, notably Mitrinović, to produce a quite aptly articulated eclectic interpretation of the modern aesthetic and critical tenets on which Young Bosnia was to build its literary activity.

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As it was easier for members of Young Bosnia to maintain cultural ties with Zagreb than with Belgrade, the latter being outside Austria-Hungary, many cultural trends reached Bosnia-Herzegovina by the very same route that took the young people of Bosnia-Herzegovina to European colleges and universities. The first larger station on that route was Zagreb, long perceived as a link between West-European culture and the oriental Balkan backwaters, an outpost of civilization through which passed, more or less belatedly,

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<sup>20</sup> Ljubomir Nedić, "Zmaj", *Iz novije srpske lirike* (Belgrade 1893), 63–98; and *Noviji srpski pisci* (Belgrade 1901), 209–243.

<sup>21</sup> Bogdan Popović, *Ogledi i članci iz književnosti*, essays "O vaspitanju ukusa", 27–58, and "Šta je veliki pesnik", 93–116 (Belgrade 1959).

<sup>22</sup> Jovan Skerlić, "Uništenje estetike i demokratizacija umetnosti", *Pisci i knjige*, vol. VIII (Belgrade 1926), 86–123.

almost all cultural movements and creative ideas that left any mark in the regional literary production. Having arrived in Zagreb to study philosophy, literature and aesthetics, the author of "National soil and modernity" for the first time came more directly in contact with a culture that, drawn through the filter of a defiant nationalism and adjusted to the views and strivings of the liberally- and democratically-minded young intelligentsia, could give an impetus to the growth, maturation and intellectual emancipation of a conservative and primitive environment replete with as yet unfreed but powerful creative forces. The guiding ideas of Croatian modernism, as articulated some ten years earlier by Milivoj Dežman Ivanov,<sup>23</sup> best matched the rebellious mood of the young Bosno-Herzegovinan writers, prompted by their very first contact with modern European literature to call for a sweeping revision of the existing literary situation.

Dissatisfied with the persistence of simplified and hackneyed literary forms utterly uncongenial to the spirit of the times, the Croatian modern movement voiced, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a demand for a revival and modernization of literature, describing the modern movement as "the struggle of individuals for freedom. The modern artist belongs not to any school. Modernism hates epigonism — it wants people to live in the present, to rely on their soul, to leave their personal mark on their work. Everyone should live one's own life. Realism undoubtedly paved the way for this belief, it taught us to look at the world; moreover, it laid down the real foundation of the artistic method. [...] Modernism seeks to encompass man in his entirety, it strives for a synthesis of idealism and realism, it wants to find a means by which man can best and most beautifully express his inner self and fulfil his vocation. [...] We want freedom; we want to live in the present, to listen out to the spirit of the times and to build on our own, not to merely stand guard at the gates of old fortresses."<sup>24</sup>

It was from this programme that Young Bosnia adopted the fighting vanguard spirit of modernism, while taking a resolutely critical stance towards the emphatic, sugary and naïve sentimentalism of literary fashionableness which, giving legitimacy to pretentious, pompous and rather bookish verbalism, encouraged the promotion of mediocre or utterly impotent writers. Lack of a national imprint, creative dependence, dilettantism, fragmentariness, inaptitude for synthesis and momentous moves,<sup>25</sup> were much too obvious weaknesses of Croatian modernism to be forgiven, let alone accepted, by the more vigorous and more militant Young Bosnia literary

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<sup>23</sup> M. Dežman Ivanov, "Naše težnje", *Hrvatski salon* 1 (1898), 8–9; Milan Marjanović, *Hrvatska moderna* I (Zagreb 1951), 91–94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Milan Marjanović, *Savremena Hrvatska* (Belgrade 1913), 309.

movement even if its literary achievement fell short of that of Croatian modernism.

The critique exposing the shortcomings of Croatian modernism was a quite notable proof of Young Bosnia's refined critical sensibility: they were up to doing a critical appraisal even of literary movements that they drew from. Their criticism of the pseudo-artistic work of literarily and creatively sterile "modernists", linked with the authentically modern strivings only on paper, was an expression of what then was a more progressive aesthetic outlook. Starting from the premise that literature ought to act directly and must not content itself with empty ornamentation, cheap symbolism and mechanical compilation, the criticism of false modernism and poetic mannerism by means of which the literary Young Bosnia sought to go beyond the Croatian modern movement was ultimately a clash of two literary generations, young and old, students and teachers, a dispute in which Young Bosnia asserted its aesthetic maturity and its independence from the outdated Sezession-style understanding of the nature and purpose of literature. This seems to be the only key to understanding a less-than-flattering comment about the Croatian modern movement Mitrinović made in passing: "In the 'Sturm und Drang' phase of Croatian modernism, being ruffled and diabolically 'sensitive', noncompliant with the logic of language and violent against the poetic material was the order of the day; thus out of imitation of the Viennese 'sezession' style was born the dishevelled style of 'sketches', 'fragments', 'instants', a sin against the logic of language just as the impressionist modelling technique in sculpture is a sin against the nature of stone. After all these 'instants' of emphatic, feignedly sick and garishly perfumed eroticism, the 'modernists' themselves returned to the simple motifs of countryside idyll but, unfortunately, yet again with the emphatics which is even less appropriate there than it is in the poetry of tense nervous atrophy."<sup>26</sup> Embracing only the revolutionary spirit of the literary and artistic programme of Croatian modernism, which laid down four basic principles of the modernist movement: creative freedom, simplification of form and expression, enrichment of content, and democratization of art,<sup>27</sup> Young Bosnia revived a significant, albeit by then quite weakened, trend in the development of modern art, adding to their aesthetics the determinist and pragmatist view of the role and effects of literature, as well as a strong conviction that the process of emancipation of national values should begin by raising the cultural level of society and by educating the masses.

<sup>26</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Pod bičem života", *Bosanska vila* XXVI (1911), No. 19, 302–303.

<sup>27</sup> Ivo Pilar, "Secesija", *Vienac* 35 (1898); *Hrvatska Moderna* I, 98–101.

The incipient idea of the democratization of culture and art can be found in the Young Bosnia writers soon after their first contact with the Masarykian concept of step-by-step progress through small-scale work, embraced and propagated by the progressively-minded university youth in Prague, Vienna and Zagreb.<sup>28</sup> Even as high-school students, members of Young Bosnia stood up against the harmful, empty and sensationalist literature that flooded the book market and choked off access for good, useful and edifying reading. At first, carried away by the romantic dream of intellectualizing and philosophically educating the mentally inert and spiritually somnolent middle classes, they preach that the philosophical spirit should permeate the masses and thus improve the public and cultural life that suffers from lack of thought, superficiality and frivolity, and has no taste for synthetic thinking which alone can give rise to steadfast and clear convictions necessary to all societies that strive for progress and general prosperity.<sup>29</sup>

Later on, however, realizing that the process of raising the general level of education is a long and laborious one, and dependent on the possibility of mobilizing all spiritual and material resources, a possibility completely beyond their power, they somewhat revise their utopian youthful beliefs and reformulate the demand for democratization in a more mature and more realistic way. "Calling for *honesty and good sense* is a far cry from believing that the enlightening of the people and the democratization of science are a basis for mending our troubles, and that everything is all right if there are enough good, popular books. What is most important there are political and economic factors; still, nothing can dissuade us from believing that attention should be paid to the moral and intellectual aspect of the people's life."<sup>30</sup> Divulging the class character of their democratism, they believed that special attention should be paid to the uplifting of the middle classes, on whose support they counted. Moral stratification, unprincipled partisanship and an almost general political immaturity were, in their view, the severest consequences of the uneducatedness and intellectual indolence of the middle classes on whose moral and spiritual soundness largely depended the progress of the entire society. "A vast majority of our actions, especially in intra-party politics, proceed from spite, envy, selfishness, hate and other disgraceful motives rather than from sound and principled beliefs. It often is a matter of *whim* rather than of *principle*. But we shall not be able to move forward in any fundamental way until most our actions

<sup>28</sup> Borivoje Jevtić, *Sarajevski atentat* (Sarajevo 1924), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Razmišljanja", *Bosanska vila* XXII (1907), No. 13-14, 221-222.

<sup>30</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Demokratizacija nauke i filosofije", *Bosanska vila* XXII (1907), No. 2, 2; No. 3, 40.

are motivated by more serious and more honest intentions. [...] Struggles for self-interest and over minor, trivial, programmatic or tactical differences have been taken to absurdity, and the sacred ambition *to have a conscience and intellectual honesty* has dwindled to near nil. [...] Everything is being done in a makeshift, offhand, sort of way, from day to day; our thinking is disorderly, agitated and stratified. But the state we are in is not caused only by our unthinkingness, our lack of principles, views and good sense; rather, this unthinkingness is the consequence of our state, which is an unavoidable moment, a transitional phase, in our national development. [...] It is a disgrace that a man who calls himself educated spends his whole life only and exclusively satisfying his basic, physical, needs, without ever even thinking of satisfying higher, finer needs of the spirit and mind! And with a vast majority of that middle public being so small in their spiritual needs, so thoughtless and all but indifferent to truth and morality, can our environment as a whole be other than foul and unhealthy, can our actions be caused by other motives than petty ambition, petty whims, petty considerations and narrow-minded morality?”<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the populist outlook inspired by the realistic Masarykian concept of small-scale work, influenced by Kočić’s rebellious realism and prompted by the economic and social situation in rural areas, led the youth to promote an intensive and systematic educational effort as one of the basic goals of their action. “To educate the uneducated, to raise the fallen and to prepare the people for a better life is the duty of every conscious member of the people, of the youth in particular. There they can give their best. That is something that our youth know and should be aware of, and they certainly should be doing the same as any youth of more advanced peoples. All the more so as our people’s bad material situation is well known, as are its tremendous illiteracy, woes, incompetence and its lagging behind others. Our educated youth should know that it is their duty to put every effort into changing that bad situation. They should be national and, being aware of the woes and needs of their people, work towards elevating, educating and strengthening the people in all areas of life and work.”<sup>32</sup> The debate about evolution versus revolution going on in high-school clubs in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1907<sup>33</sup> engendered a programme of small-scale work. “Going into the people — small-scale work, getting closer together and education”<sup>34</sup> was the basis of the programme, because “only the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Omladina i društveno prosvjećivanje”, *Srpska omladina* I (1913), No. 5, 92–94.

<sup>33</sup> Pero Slijepčević, *Mlada Bosna. Napor Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo 1929), 191.

<sup>34</sup> “Jedna zabilješka o sitnom radu”, in Vojislav Bogićević, *Mlada Bosna: Pisma i prilozii* (Sarajevo 1954), 364–365.



economically and nationally well educated peoples are able to endure this cultural struggle, only those who are very strong, who have their culture and great faith in themselves can endure and win. It is true that a people's problems can be solved by using weapons, that the strength and power of a people is judged by its military power, [...] but to solve problems using weapons requires preliminary preparatory work with the masses."<sup>35</sup> Educating the masses on a national scale, elevating and channelling people's energy, explaining the current economic and social situation, struggling against illiteracy, idleness, lethargy and oriental fatalism were the key elements of the small-scale work programme to be carried out in face-to-face communication with the common people.

The young intelligentsia, on the model of the Russian populists, set out on foot to reach people,<sup>36</sup> conceiving of their small-scale work as a sort of popular university. The educational programme included lecturing on the economy (tenant-peasants question, agricultural cooperatives, position of Bosnia-Herzegovina in relation to Austria-Hungary), hygiene (alcoholism, syphilis, tuberculosis, health standards, food, clothing etc.), the history of the South-Slavic peoples and topical social issues.<sup>37</sup> Seeing themselves as a generation belonging to the future and reshaping tradition by introducing new and progressive concepts, members of Young Bosnia were precise in outlining the framework and guidelines for their work. "Instead of looking back at graves, at the past, the Serbian young generation ought to get rid of all influence of chivalrous romance and embark boldly upon the noble and beneficial small-scale work that brings about a national revival. Only a materially well-situated people can and must win its freedom, must destroy all vestiges of the old and outdated, and create the new, contemporary, and modern instead."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, small-scale work and cultural action were the most important forms of youth activism in the period between the Annexation and the Balkan Wars. Their activism was supported by nationalistic circles in Serbia, notably by the *Narodna odbrana* (People's Defence): "small-scale and minute work, the humble, unnoticeable and unnoticed work of individuals on the small and minute, when added together, give a great achievement."<sup>39</sup>

Much later, Lev Trotsky, under the pseudonym Oto Antid, published in the Kiev-based paper *Thought* an interesting testimony of Vladi-

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<sup>35</sup> Vojislav Vasiljević, "Kako ćemo obrazovati naše mase", *ibid.*, 366–369.

<sup>36</sup> Drago Ljubibratić, *Gavrilo Princip* (Belgrade 1959), 144–148.

<sup>37</sup> "Omladina i društveno prosvjećivanje", 93.

<sup>38</sup> Gaćinović, "Bilješka o sitnom radu", *Ogledi i pisma*, 303.

<sup>39</sup> *Narodna odbrana* (Belgrade 1911), 27.

mir Gaćinović about the youth movement and small-scale work in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the eve of the First World War, reportedly given at the Parisian café La Rotonde,<sup>40</sup> a wartime venue for many émigrés, artists, writers and intellectuals from all parts of Europe.<sup>41</sup> “This new generation,” Gaćinović recollects his comrades, “constitutes the intelligentsia of the Serbo-Croatian countryside and, led by the school youth, they set up large rural societies: cooperative, anti-alcoholic, gymnastic, and introduce all of them to broad national and social ideas. [...] The school youth, of rural origin for the most part, hasten to impart their knowledge to peasants, start courses, found reading-rooms and popular newspapers. During the summer holidays, the university and high-school youth organize scientific-propagandistic excursions. In the villages and towns of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Croatia and Slovenia, they lecture on medicine, geography and political economy. All the year round special groups collect the material for the lectures, which they then publish in newspapers and brochures and spread among the masses. Each Yugoslav province used to have its periodicals devoted to the people, their needs and problems, and gathered round itself the intelligentsia under the slogan ‘Repay a debt to the people.’ [...] Of course, our publications were directed against Austrian policies, but that was the voice of an awakened love for the people, rather than of conscious political thought. And yet, as the movement evolved, political thought also began to awake.”<sup>42</sup>

However, Young Bosnia’s small-scale work was soon thwarted. The youths accused in the Pjanić-Ljubibratić trial were charged with, *inter alia*, delivering speeches to villagers while touring the rural areas of Herzegovina.<sup>43</sup> After the trial before the District Court in Sarajevo ended in April 1913,<sup>44</sup> small-scale work virtually died out,<sup>45</sup> one of the additional reasons being its poor organization. The young intelligentsia’s educational and propagandistic action on the ground, among the people, was an expression of their noble intention to sensitize the masses to the common cause rather than an organized ideological and political preparation. Such preparation was beyond their power, because they had not developed political guidelines

<sup>40</sup> Nikola Trišić, *Sarajevski atentat u svjetlu bibliografskih podataka* (Sarajevo 1960), 94.

<sup>41</sup> Tin Ujević, “Uz spomenicu Vladimira Gaćinovića”, *Jugoslovenska njiva* V (1921), No. 45, 716–717; No. 46, 732–734; Tin Ujević, “Film i auto u djelu Ilje Erenburga”, *Ljudi za vratima gostionice* (Zagreb 1938), 124–125.

<sup>42</sup> L[ev] T[rotsky], *Sarajevski atentat* (Belgrade 1922), 6–7.

<sup>43</sup> Ljubibratić, *Gavrilo Princip*, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Bogićević, *Mlada Bosna*, 467–468.

<sup>45</sup> Jevtić, *Sarajevski atentat*, 18.

just as they were unable, in spite of all efforts, to define and prop up a jointly shared set of aesthetic criteria.

On the eve of the First World War, imbued with a strong Yugoslav feeling manifested in militant national-liberation activism rather than in patient educational effort, Young Bosnia even openly renounced small-scale work as an inadequately efficient, far too slow and, ultimately, opportunistic method of revolutionary action. Instead, it avowed the principle of open and determined struggle. The evolution or revolution dilemma seems to have been resolved. "To the gurgling stomach we prefer the unrestrainable palpitation of the national heart, and to gelded satiation, the peril in the struggle for the nation and its soul's sacred demands. Nor does the bastardly and fattened Czech wisdom about the Only-saving and Only-possible, complete with 'small-scale work' — unbelievably small and useless — satisfy the most profound demand of the national being, national honour; nor is the 'political' and 'cultural' work of endless and phlegmatic evolution enough to us [...] What we want now is not a state-building 'culture', but life, and we do not believe that a wise progress will give us a state, but we have the will to believe that only a worthily redeemed and worthy-of-us state will create a Culture worthy of us. [...] It is unnational to beg for mercy: justice is only attainable with courage. [...] Doubt not and despair not; by believing in our resolve, we believe in our purpose, our salvation: let us follow our manly ancestors, with courage to justice."<sup>46</sup> The road travelled from small isolated groups and debate clubs absorbed in lengthy discussion about the tactics and methods of struggle to a fervent and vigorous liberation youth movement marked the genesis of Young Bosnia which, lacking a common and firm ideological orientation and sufficient understanding of the social structure, adopted the idea of militant Yugoslavism as the most suitable form of revolutionary action.

The democratism of Young Bosnia, which was reflected in, among other things, the demand for literary revival and modernization as well as in the adoption and propagation of the concept of mass education and cultural edification, was largely an echo of the democratic spirit of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Moreover, from Serbia, nostalgically dreamt of by all progressive-minded youth as being "the road of South-Slavic national and social salvation", on which Belgrade shone as the "magical light of a Piedmontese beacon on the island of Utopia",<sup>47</sup> came the clear sound of Skerlić's tribunic words, awakening and enflaming the feeling of national pride and inaugurating the cult of healthiness, strength and

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<sup>46</sup> Dimitrije Mitrović, "Za Jugoslaviju!", *Vihor* I (1914), No. 5, 81–83.

<sup>47</sup> Miroslav Krleža, "Lamentacija o prosperitetu", *Deset krvavih godina* (Zagreb 1957), 397.

energy. The lesson the Bosnian youth believed they learnt was that all vital issues and problems, which they themselves intuited or recognized, would be resolved if national liberation should come first and social revolution in its wake. By its ideological constitution and orientation, the Young Bosnia movement as a whole was neither the political nor social expression of any one class or any one social layer. As it represented neither the peasantry, nor the middle classes, neither the working class nor even the intelligentsia,<sup>48</sup> its position in the social and economic structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the period under study ensured it the possibility of pursuing revolutionary activities in almost all areas of public life.

The revolt against primitivism, folklorism, sentimentality and unproductive pathetic rhetoric in literature; the criticism of intellectual indolence, inertia, conservatism, narrow-mindedness, biased nationalism and petty partisanship; the demand for the democratization of science and art, and, especially, educational action at a grassroots level, were forms of Young Bosnia's cultural action. They had sympathies for the woes and aspirations of the nationally and socially jeopardized social classes because they largely felt them themselves, but lacking a clear-cut platform and firm point of support in revolutionary struggle, they failed, in spite of all their efforts, spontaneous rather than conscious, to attain a higher level of intellectual and conceptual maturity.

Viewed in that light, Young Bosnia's literary activity may be seen as a form of their political action. Torn between ethics and aesthetics, between the political and the artistic, Young Bosnia failed to lay down a consistent literary programme and to define clear-cut literary criteria. Instead, it tended to adjust to the times, circumstances, moment's needs and often contradictory influences. Notwithstanding its many mistaken beliefs, disagreements and vacillations, it indeed marked many important moments in the development of our literary thought. Venturing beyond the narrow boundaries of a regional and in many respects provincial literacy, the Young Bosnia writers were among the first in our literature to embrace and apply modern European criteria and to champion the principles of democratism and creative freedom, spiritual progress, active humanism and artistic truth.

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The social position of Young Bosnia had a direct effect on its critical attitude towards political groups and parties, which in turn enabled, in a certain way and to a certain extent, its critical autonomy in the field of art and literature. Criticizing the literary situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Young Bosnia

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<sup>48</sup> Veselin Masleša, *Mlada Bosna* (Sarajevo 1945), 131.

writers in fact stood up against the unwholesome relations in the society to which they belonged and which they expected to invest its spiritual and moral resources into smoothing the process of national revival. Moreover, many of them may be said to have used literary issues as an excuse for divulging their political and conceptual standpoint, for expressing their dissatisfaction and articulating their demands.

In a text about Milutin Uskoković's short stories, for example, Vladimir Gaćinović develops the ideas of militancy, energy and optimism, thereby putting forth his political and social programme rather than his literary criteria. "Youth literature has never before produced an impression of such devastation, gloom, decay, such dejection and hopelessness, and such dark ideology as it does now. Its life manifestations have never before been as scrunched, uncertain and confused, and all that in a vigorous, flamboyant and strong race. Nothing is as painful and tragic for a generation that is on the threshold of life, when the world is supposed to be too small for its soul, as anaemia, anguish and doubt. Perhaps the generation of tomorrow will bring with it a piece of soul and sun so indispensable to our tormented society."<sup>49</sup> There was little difference between his understanding of the young generation's literary role and the political programme of the high-school youth in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The latter, too, highly valued the task of nurturing and boosting moral, physical and intellectual strength, convinced that only a healthy, strong and dynamic youth was capable of reshaping the established social and political relations. "Amidst our overall captivity, we should be the new blood, new outlook, new morality, new race, because only we can bring about the creation of the new, [...] which we shall make in ourselves while still at school, in our small school chapters, where we debate, read, speak, create and think. We have to refresh our faith, to keep up our physical and enhance our moral and intellectual strength, and thus become able to carry out a true transformation of society."<sup>50</sup> Unhesitant to openly criticize social relations, members of Young Bosnia believed that there was only one way out of the stale backwaters of political and party life: a struggle against pessimism, downheartedness and low spirits,<sup>51</sup> against guile, slander, allegations and counter-allegations, against all that they saw as characterizing the public life of an environment immersed in politicking, opportunism, moral distortion and an unproductive and unwholesome atmosphere.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Gaćinović, "Vitae fragmenta", *Bosanska vila* XXIV (1909), No. 5, 238.

<sup>50</sup> "Nacrt jednog predavanja", in Božo Cerović, *Bosanski omladinci i sarajevski atentat* (Sarajevo 1930), 185–186.

<sup>51</sup> Bogdan Žerajić according to Gaćinović, *Ogledi i pisma*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Mitrinović, "Demokratizacija".

It was only Petar Kočić and his political group that the youth considered worthy of some support. Having espoused the belief that national liberation would clear the way for the triumph of social justice, they enthusiastically adopted the militant principle of Kočić's *Otadžbina*: stand on your own two feet and speak up about all woes and troubles of the people. Many forms of Young Bosnia's activity were contained in Kočić's programme of the renewed *Otadžbina*, restarted with the intention to disturb the "grave-like peace", break the spine-chilling silence and let "the manly and clear voice be heard, unpleasant to the ear of power-holders and crawlers, but pleasant to the ear of the depressed and humiliated in village and town alike."<sup>53</sup> Although they had never stopped contributing to Serbian nationalistically oriented political papers, *Srpska riječ* and *Narod*, run by prominent national activists, publicists and writers, such as Vasilj Grdjić, Veljko Petrović, Jef-to Dedijer and Risto Radulović,<sup>54</sup> the Young Bosnia writers increasingly shifted, especially after the Balkan Wars, towards the revolutionary youth movement and, eventually, just before the First World War, switched to direct and close collaboration with the progressive Yugoslav youth, while politically supporting Jovan Skerlić, primarily as a national worker, as well as more progressive portions of the Serbo-Croatian coalition, liberal progressivists and democrats, and not only those in Bosnia-Herzegovina but also in other Austro-Hungarian South-Slavic lands, Slovenia, Croatia and Dalmatia.<sup>55</sup>

Having asserted themselves in the cultural as well as political struggle, the young generation of Croatian, Dalmatian, Slovene, Bosnian and Herzegovinan intellectuals assumed at the beginning of the century the position of radical democratism which, despite its quite strong national orientation, contained echoes of socialist ideas observable mostly in their approach to the peasantry and agrarian questions. Their activity gained momentum especially after the downfall of the Kuhen regime in Croatia and the unpopular Kállay administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina, that is in a period marked by significant political events, such as the Rijeka (Fiume) and Zadar (Zara) resolutions (3/17 October 1905)<sup>56</sup> and the formation of the Serbo-Croatian coalition. Championing democratic principles, such as universal suffrage, freedom of assembly and association, labour rights protection and taxation

<sup>53</sup> Petar Kočić, "O programu obnovljene *Otadžbine*", in vol. II of Petar Kočić's Collected Works (Belgrade 1961), 156–157.

<sup>54</sup> Djordje Pejanović, *Štampa Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo 1949), 58 and 62.

<sup>55</sup> Branko Čubrilović, *Petar Kočić* (Sarajevo 1953), 214.

<sup>56</sup> Frano Supilo, *Politika u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb 1953), 317–319.

system reforms,<sup>57</sup> the Serbo-Croatian coalition initially seemed to offer new potentials for collaboration on a national basis, which gave a boost to the Yugoslav idea round which the progressive youth gathered. After the Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially after the Balkan Wars, the Yugoslav idea became pivotal to the revolutionary-minded youth who, by putting in the demand for national liberation, sought to overcome the situation caused by the opportunism of the part of society that complied with the Austro-Hungarian administration.<sup>58</sup> Young Bosnia's participation in the youth movement was just one of many trends among the pre-war university and high-school youth, the trend of pronounced militancy manifested in cultural and political action alike.

An important form of national struggle, widely spoken and written of with excitement and romantic pathos, especially in the youth press, was an insistence on the affinity between and unity of Serbian and Croatian literatures. Taking the advantage of its position halfway between Zagreb and Belgrade, the literary Young Bosnia embraced and pursued the action of bringing the two literatures of one language closer to one another. Although it took some of Young Bosnia's writers quite a while to overcome the Serbian overemphasized national complex, Young Bosnia's literary Yugoslavism was an expression of their genuine belief that the unity of Serbian and Croatian cultures would best exemplify the two peoples' brotherhood and be the firmest pledge of their future.

Trained at Austrian schools with many distinguished Croat intellectuals among their teachers, and largely dependent on the Zagreb book market, which was much easier to get to than Belgrade and Serbia, the Young Bosnia writers, despite their oft-stated affiliation to Serbian literature, made virtually no distinction between Serbian and Croatian authors; they would accept every good book of a Croatian author as their own, just as they would reject every bad book of a Serbian author. The possibility of gaining recognition in Belgrade as well as in Zagreb led them to develop and nurture an even-handed attitude towards the two centres, genuinely believing that they were doing a good and useful thing, the more so as such literary policy matched up with their national action and their strong national feeling.

Literary criticism was assigned by some of Young Bosnia's literary workers a notable role in fostering the idea of Serbo-Croatian unity. Hence they called upon prominent Serbian critics, such as Jovan Skerlić, Bogdan Popović, Pavle Popović or Branko Lazarević, to pay greater attention to Croatian literature, particularly to younger writers, and not only in order

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<sup>57</sup> "Manifest Hrvatsko-srpske koalicije od 12. decembra 1905", in Josip Horvat, *Politička povijest Hrvatske* (Zagreb, n.d.), vol. I, 366–368.

<sup>58</sup> Masleša, *Mlada Bosna*, 124.

that these might be introduced to the Serbian reading public, but also in order that, in a roundabout but efficient way, the unity of two literatures might be achieved.<sup>59</sup> Motivated by such ideas, they became more seriously and more systematically engaged in literary criticism, making no distinction between Serb and Croat authors. Given that the youth's carefully cultivated critical activity in fact marked the beginning of literary criticism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is by no means an accident that criticism, as one of the most important achievements of the Young Bosnia literary movement, was predicated upon the concept of Serbo-Croatian cultural unity. Later on, as critical thought in Bosnia-Herzegovina grew stronger, this fact played a remarkably helpful role in the process of developing objective evaluation criteria for both Serbian and Croatian authors. Young Bosnia's Yugoslavism set up the tradition of championing the unity of two literatures, a tradition that remained a virtue of not only the criticism written in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also of most critics for whom Bosnia-Herzegovina was a formative setting.

What the Young Bosnia writers saw as their foremost duty and a prerequisite for national action in literature was the obliteration of all borders and a closer acquaintance of a broad reading public with the work of Serbian and Croatian authors. "It is embarrassing to say, but it is a sad fact that we Serbs know incredibly little about Croatian literature. That Croats know perhaps even less about ours is not an excuse. It is high time to realize that cultural rapprochement and unity is needed and necessary, and to work, with that conviction, towards our people's complete national and cultural togetherness. If the element of our people called Croat were more interested in our life, [...] then Croats would be able to say that apart from their own cultural workers they have ours as well; likewise, if the element of our people called Serb were more interested in Croat life, then the number of Serbian cultural workers would double. And the number of cultural treasures would also double. The work of Bukovac, Meštrović, Lisinski, Šenoa, Marković, Dyalski, Kranjčević, Tresić, Begović, Nazor, Nikolić, Kosor, Vidrić and others would be as much Serbian as the work of Jovanović, Mokranjac, Marinković, Čorić, Lazarević, Knežević, Petronijević, Matavulj, Dučić, Šantić, Rakić, Stefanović, Stanković, Pribičević and Budisavljević would be Croatian. There is today a differentiation in art and literary trends, and nothing would be more productive than crossbreeding between these two slightly differentiated spirits of a single people. A Kranjčević would certainly be a significant and good influence on our younger literati, just as Kozarac, Leskovar, Nazor, Tresić, Begović, Vidrić and Domjanić could

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<sup>59</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Pjesnik Mihovil Nikolić", *Bosanska vila* XXIII (1908), No. 29, 450-452.



bring many good and new things. Likewise, Croatian literature would undoubtedly use the tone or language of our Dučić, Rakić, Kočić; the critical spirit of Nedić, the good taste of Sl. Jovanović, the style of Skerlić, Popović and many others.”<sup>60</sup>

In addition to applying an even-handed critical approach and criteria to Serbian and Croatian literatures as a method of bringing the two closer together, the Young Bosnia writers proposed concrete forms of collaboration. Thus, Croatian literary magazines, notably *Hrvatsko kolo*, the organ of *Matica hrvatska*, were supposed to publish exhaustive annual reports on Serbian literary developments and trends; *Letopis Matice srpske* was to do the same thing for the Serbian public. Furthermore, regular exchange of magazines, journals and books, publication of the finest works of Croatian authors in the Serbian literary press and vice versa, opening of a Serbian bookshop in Zagreb and a Croatian one in Belgrade, reform of the high-school literature curriculum, joint publication of collections and anthologies,<sup>61</sup> were considered a highly helpful tool for establishing closer ties between Serbian and Croatian literatures. Given that both were written in the same, and common, Serbo-Croatian literary language, their unity was to be the ultimate ideal of all writers, and the fulfilment of that ideal their ultimate national duty.<sup>62</sup>

Aware that language might play a cohesive role, the Young Bosnia writers paid particular attention to the problems of style and language. Coming from the areas known for their uncorrupted vernacular speech, where a refined sense of language was acquired in early childhood, they were unsympathetic to the pretentiousness and bookishness of poetic language, arguing that syntactic, grammatical and stylistic errors spoiled the enjoyment even of the best poets. Mitrinović harshly criticized linguistic errors even in the prose and poetry writers whom he, for one reason or another, held in high esteem and to whom he devoted extensive analytical essays. In spite of his positive appraisal of Dvorniković's essays on psychological pedagogy, he criticized the author for using an otherwise nonexistent linguistic mishmash instead of the pure and correct Croatian language.<sup>63</sup> The literary merit of Vladimir Vidrić's poetry, which Mitrinović appreciated for its chiselled style and formal beauty and in which he saw amazing vitality and

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<sup>60</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Pjesma Marina Sabića", *Bosanska vila* XXIII (1908), No. 23, 366–368.

<sup>61</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Niz napomena", *Bosanska vila* XXIV (1909), No. 19–20, 289–290.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Eseji iz područja psihološke pedagogije i estetike", *Bosanska vila* XXVI (1911), No. 6, 94–95; No. 7–8, 123–124.

murky passion, would in his view have been incomparably greater had the poet shown greater stylistic responsibility and sense of linguistic purity.<sup>64</sup> Dragutin Domjanić's lyric poetry, whose merit Mitrinović acknowledged albeit criticizing its colourless affectation and overly decorative phrase, was subjected to a very careful language analysis which shows not only the young critic's grammatical and stylistic rigour but also his orthodoxy and stubborn belief that the eastern or southern dialect is more suited to poetry than the western one<sup>65</sup> — a thesis which, in a somewhat modified form, could be heard again a few years later, even from some Croatian authors,<sup>66</sup> in a poll conducted by the *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Herald). Finding that Domjanić uses Serbo-Croatian as if he were an advanced foreign learner, Mitrinović interprets this shortcoming by the poet's uncritical concessions to the *kajkavian* dialect, concessions often "greater than the necessary, unquestioning abidance by the grammar, syntax and style of our language."<sup>67</sup>

Even at its toughest, the linguistic purism of the Young Bosnia writers and critics was nothing other than a well-intentioned attempt to remove all obstacles in an area vitally important to national literature in order to clear the way for promising and progressive trends. Considering that members of Young Bosnia were among the first to support and elaborate the idea of literary language unity as a prerequisite for Serbo-Croatian cultural integration, as testified by their incidental language analyses, it is no wonder that linguistic purism became an essential ingredient of their criticism. The idea was even a subject of separate grammatical analyses where members of Young Bosnia, even before the abovementioned poll of *Srpski književni glasnik*, argued for the adoption of *ekavian* for both Serbian and Croatian literatures, seeing literary language unification as the first step towards cultural integration, and believing that it was the duty of the progressive young Bosno-Herzegovinan writers to get the action going.<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding their major or minor misconceptions, their attempt to call writers' attention to the problems of linguistic expression, syntax and style, should therefore be seen primarily as a striving for pulling together all cultural and spiri-

<sup>64</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Pjesme Vladimira Vidrića", *Bosanska vila* XXIV (1909), No. 10, 157-159.

<sup>65</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Hrvatski pjesnik Dragutin Domjanić", *Bosanska vila* XXVI (1911), No. 11-12, 175-178; No. 13-14, 208-209; No. 18, 283-284; No. 19, 296-297.

<sup>66</sup> Milan Marjanović, "Odgovor na anketu o južnom ili istočnom narečju u srpsko-hrvatskoj književnosti", *Srpski književni glasnik* XXXII (1914), No. 4, 285-287.

<sup>67</sup> Mitrinović, "Dragutin Domjanić", 175.

<sup>68</sup> Pero Slijepčević, "Stil, dijalekat, interpunkcija", *Srpska omladina* I (1912), No. 1, 7-12.

tual resources of the people because, in their view, only if old and insignificant differences and divisions are overcome will the people be able to keep pace with modern European civilization. In 1913 Jovan Skerlić argued that Young Bosnia, with its attitude and its language policy, led the way in bringing Serbs and Croats together.<sup>69</sup>

Much as they were fond of writing about language and language unity, especially in their texts on Croatian authors, members of the Young Bosnia literary movement did not let syntactic and grammatical divergences sever their ties with Croatian literature and writers. Almost a regular contributor to *Bosanska vila* between 1907 and 1913, Mitrinović paid equal attention to Serbian and Croatian literary developments. Among his noticed critiques are those of Mihovil Nikolić, Antun Tresić Pavičić, Vladimir Nazor, Vladimir Vidrić and Dragutin Domjanić, all prominent representatives of Croatian poetry in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Mitrinović increasingly shifted his focus from criticism of the current literary production to more general aesthetic and philosophic issues, his role as Young Bosnia's leading critic was taken by Miloš Vidaković, a more sophisticated, poised and balanced observer. Vidaković was not as loud about nationalism and cultural integration. Contributing to Risto Radulović's *Narod* (People) for a while, he wrote simply and naturally about books as they came to his hands, whether Serbian, Croatian, German, French, Russian or Italian, placing the criterion of aesthetic merit above any tendentiousness. Vidaković's standards were quite high and applied consistently to all literature, domestic and foreign alike.

Young Bosnia thus managed to promote the spirit of Yugoslavism and Serbo-Croatian cultural unity as a force to which even the older, nationally oversensitive and conservative, generation of writers and cultural workers of Bosnia-Herzegovina began to yield. In 1910 *Bosanska vila* marked its twenty-fifth anniversary by devoting several issues to the literatures of Serbia, Vojvodina, Croatia, Dalmatia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The Croatian issue, contributed to by Vatroslav Jagić, Milan Marjanović, Milan Begović, Tugomir Alaupović, Dragutin Domjanić, Vladimir Nazor, Ljubo Vizner, Josip Kosor, Rikard Katalinić Jeretov, Antun Tresić Pavičić, Janko Polić Kamov and others, was edited jointly by Dr Milan Prelog and twenty-three-year old Dimitrije Mitrinović who, furthermore, laid down the magazine's new literary and political programme attuned to the artistic and nationalistic outlooks of the youth.

Arguing for *Bosanska vila* as a combative, brisk and modern literary magazine, he sees its modernity in a new attitude towards the national

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<sup>69</sup> Jovan Skerlić, "Istočno ili južno narečje: razlozi za južno narečje", *Srpski književni glasnik* XXXI (1913), No. 11-12, 862-873.

question. "Abandoning its nationalistic exclusiveness, until recently needed and understandable, it should see the Croatian people not as kindred but as its own people and Croatian literature as its own literature. That brings new tasks: to break down the chauvinistic bias against Serbo-Croatian national unity which, apart from political and historical factors, obstructs the unity of our literature; secondly, to introduce Croatian authors and literary work to the Serbian public. *Bosanska vila* has been working in that sense lately, but not systematically and intensive enough; from now on, it is going to perform this duty with utmost seriousness, convinced that in that way it not only helps our literary advancement, but also fulfils its Yugoslav duty, which is indispensable to Bosnia. At some point in the future, if it gets a good response and enough understanding from the public, *Bosanska vila* might also approach Slovene, and even Bulgarian, literature and thus create a small and nice Yugoslavdom in Sarajevo. That is my genuine desire. It is my profound belief that Bosnia should become the land of a most brotherly and most vigorous Yugoslav work. And I believe that in it *Bosanska vila* should play its honourable part."<sup>70</sup> Opting for cultural action on a Yugoslav level, Young Bosnia took the road to its full literary affirmation and took the Yugoslav idea beyond the borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The idea attracted the youth gathered round clubs and magazines that mushroomed in all Austro-Hungarian provinces, not for the sake of tradition or on the basis of propaganda, but "for the sake of the future and on the basis of spiritual civilization".<sup>71</sup> Seeking to make their small, backward-looking, discordant and stratified native land into a pivot of a modern national and cultural movement, the Young Bosnia writers took the lead in objectivity and consistency, among other things because their Yugoslavism was an exceptionally suitable and rewarding construct by means of which they hoped to "intensify and expand the struggle against Austria-Hungary and overcome the obstacles in their way".<sup>72</sup> Notwithstanding their often fatal misconceptions, such as the belief that a predominantly national cultural action could mobilize the socially oppressed masses, they enriched the literary life of Bosnia-Herzegovina with fresh and vital ideas which put a hitherto regional literature on an equal footing with the literatures of the other Yugoslav peoples and at the head of a movement for cultural revival and modernization.

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<sup>70</sup> Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Za naš književni rad", *Bosanska vila* XXV (1910), No. 1-2, 19-20.

<sup>71</sup> Pero Slijepčević, "Zora, glasnik srpske napredne omladine", *Bosanska vila* XXV, No. 23-24 (1910), 355-357.

<sup>72</sup> Masleša, *Mlada Bosna*, 125.

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