

Introduction

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In her long career teaching Serbo-Croatian (C/B/S) language, literature, and culture, mentoring, and advising students' senior and master's theses at Columbia University, Radmila "Rajka" Gorup has kindled interest in Slavic studies amongst her students and peers well beyond the confines of her primary research discipline of linguistics. In addition to maintaining a steady stream of academic publications in Slavic and General Linguistics, she has been the prime mover of many projects and publications in Serbian literature and culture with a worldwide impact. Rajka has made her profession into an art—the art of living. There is no visible divide between her private and public life. She is always available for joint projects, and her residence in New York has always been the hub for visiting scholars from around the world, to whom she and her husband Ivan Gorup have offered unfailing hospitality. Rajka created and has maintained a wide professional network across the communities of Slavic scholars, writers, and intellectuals in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia, as well as in her native Serbia and ex-Yugoslavia. Rajka, in fact, has been and continues to be an unofficial ambassador of Serbian culture for all visiting scholars and dignitaries at Columbia. Her initiative—the Njegoš Endowment for Serbian Language and Culture at Columbia University—received strong institutional support and has become one of the main forums for the dissemination in the US of Serbian culture and for the discussion of contemporary Serbian public affairs. In this way, Rajka has offered service to public life in America—her adopted country.

What is most striking about Rajka's career is a total absence of personal ambition and self-promotion, which usually translate into feverish activity and anxiety. Rajka's *modus operandi* is tranquility itself. She can never be seen hurrying, although she is always on the go. She keeps calm under the most intense pressure from deadlines and institutional obligations. She never makes a fuss. Her actions have a steady rhythm—without thinking about it, Rajka always paces herself. In this way she transforms work into the art of liv-

ing. Anyone who is in her orbit starts to feel calmer and happier while in her presence. There is always something festive about being or staying with Rajka.

While pursuing work as the art of life, Rajka engaged in serious scholarship and administration. Her years at the helm of the North American Society for Serbian Studies (NASSS), of which she was President from 1996 to 1998, saw the organization of Serbian-American scholars thrive and increase in scholarly production, mainly associated with the journal *Serbian Studies*, the official organ of the NASSS. Through the Njegoš Foundation, Rajka was instrumental in hosting a string of high-profile visitors to Columbia University: the first democratic President of Serbia, Vojislav Koštunica; the former senator and two-term Ohio governor, George Voinovich; the writers Svetlana Velmar Janković and Vladimir Kecmanović; the Pulitzer Prize winner for Poetry and fifteenth Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, Charles Simic; the Bishop Irinej; and Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia, to name only a few.

The present volume of contributions from Rajka's academic and artistic colleagues—all affiliated with various tertiary and research institutions in the US and internationally—demonstrates the impact of Rajka's scholarly life on her surroundings. Every one of the contributors is testimony to how many lives Rajka's art of living has touched. All are tributes to her kindness and collegiality and honor her scholarship.



The content of this volume is interdisciplinary in the true sense of the term. It contains scholarly articles on Slavic culture, the fields of linguistics, literary studies, film, social history, art history, cultural studies, and creative writing. While most articles deal with a topic connected with the field of Slavic studies, several articles transcend the traditional methodological confines of this multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary domain and venture into what has until recently been uncharted territory for Slavic scholars: hydro-poetics and the psychoanalytic poetics of the gaze. All the essays remain firmly grounded in the time-honored close-reading-of-the-text methodology, and offer original readings and new insights into well-known, less well-known, or unknown texts.



The two contributions with which the volume opens are in some sense *hors de serie*: Ranko Bugarski's essay on "The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages" and Svetlana Rakić's "Art and Reality Now: Serbian Perspectives." They belong together by being exceptional amongst all the

other contributions in the volume. Bugarski's article is closest to Rajka's own field of expertise, theoretical and applied linguistics. His essay is particularly topical today, in 2016, when the European Union and all its laws have been put under a question mark by Brexit or are undergoing a re-examination by those who remain firmly committed to the idea of a united Europe. As a member of the international Committee of Experts on the European Charter, Bugarski has a unique insight into the operation of the Charter on minority languages, with special reference to the languages of former Yugoslavia. His essay is like a "linguistics charter" on minority languages and can be placed in the service of further scholarship.

Svetlana Rakić's essay, accompanied by six illustrations, is another highlight of the volume through its unique character. Following the dictates of true art—and not the art which follows "the fashion of the day"—Rakić selects six contemporary Serbian artists who have witnessed the dramatic historical transformations of the 1990s and found a new artistic language to express "the suffering, empathy, isolation and transience" of the times and of human life in general. Rakić interprets all the paintings as reflections of the gloom of Serbia's historical and political situation, although the minimalist staged spaces in Dragoslav Knežević's *Giacometti* and *Old Studio* (2002 and 2001) could also remind us of the empty stage of Samuel Beckett's plays, portraying a human condition in a universe emptied of God and the categorical moral imperative, leaving only Sameness and the impossible Real as points of orientation for contemporary society and the individual. Similarly, Milutin Dragojlović's *Pennsylvania Station* (1995), as well as being an indictment of the degradation of history and beauty in favor of economic progress, may be read as an allusion to the ordered silent world of the Symbolic order of Reason of M. C. Escher's drawings and lithographs, whose artistic language is employed by the Serbian painter to gauge his own theme. One striking feature of Milan Tucović's *Memory of the Docks* (2006–09), with all its European symbols, is that the faces of some of the "generic male" characters (like the two men in the center of the painting), as well as the boy in the striped jacket and the soldier sitting on the oil drums, appear to have non-European facial features. Whether this is a telescoped view of Europe's past and a prescient view of Europe's future born of the present, or an attempt to universalize—and therefore abandon—the concept of a European (racial) identity is up to the individual viewer to decide. At any rate, it is clear from Rakić's analysis of the six Serbian painters that their iconography draws exhaustively on the European artistic and cultural canon of the past in order to express concern about the present and future direction of the Europeans, which includes the Serbs.

Marijeta Božović's article "The Danube and *The Ister*: Towards a Hydro-poetics of Europe's River" opens up a new theoretical domain—"Dan-

ube studies." By taking the Danube as a *point de repère*, Europe's cultural history and cultural heritage are viewed through a transcultural and transnational lens. This the author does by invoking the representations of the Danube in a new film genre—the philosophical documentary—whose exponents are, in the first instance, two young filmmakers from Australia. Contextualizing David Barison and Daniel Ross's film *The Ister* (2004) in a rich tapestry of critical and cinematic works, Božović not only brings to bear a whole new analytic vista of river poetics, but in some sense presents all this material as a manifesto of Danube studies and a "call to arms" against "terra-centric" thinking: "Following Étienne Balibar's concept of equaliberty and an eco-critical turn in the humanities, we call for an emergent field of Danube studies to displace terra-centric rationality with hydro-centric imagination."

Hydropoetics, like ecocriticism, appropriates the critical vocabulary of sociopolitical and civilization studies, if not strictly postcolonialism ("imperial desires," "emancipatory potentialities") and of the philosophers-turned-sociologists and political scientists Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy ("repressed memory," "the incomprehensible," "imperial ambitions," "historical tragedies," "twentieth-century technological atrocities"). The discussion's focus is Heidegger's 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin's hymns, in particular the philosopher's comments on the poem "The Ister." However, the discussion is not philosophical; rather it involves the judgment of history (speaking through a French philosopher), passed on Heidegger's moral conduct after World War II. Thus "Danube studies" emerge as a moral court as well as an analytic tool inspired by a transcultural river.

Vladimir Zorić takes up the poetics of water, not in connection with a European transcultural river, but as a metaphor for exile. Originally perceived by the ancient world of mythology, the topos of water is transposed by Zorić into a tool for analyzing the literary works of Miloš Crnjanski, in which the symbolism of water represents "a modern response to the ancient rhetoric code."

From here on, the contributions delve into a number of different topics in literature, film, culture, and even memoir, which are united by the method of close-reading-of-texts, and thus subsumed under aspects of Comparative Literature.

Jovana Babović examines urban spaces in Belgrade of the interwar years (1920s–30s) and discusses the changes in social interaction brought about by the domestication of urban entertainment centering around the park of Kalemegdan. The two essays on Meša Selimović's epochal Yugoslav novel *Death and the Dervish* (1966) treat the question of fatalism, faith, and tragedy in the life of the central hero, Ahmed Nurudin. Zoran Milutinović discusses the dialectic of belief and loss of faith of Nurudin in the light of the events of his life, which have a fatality about them. Marija Mitrović, whose contribution is in Serbian, examines the novel and its hero from the perspective of the

poetics of tragedy. This leads the author to a far-reaching—radical—conclusion about the deconstruction of ideology in a totalitarian society by a precient Selimović. The following two essays are concerned with the metatheoretical questions of reading literary and poetic texts. Aleksandar Bošković, whose contribution is the only other one in Serbian, poses the problem of what kind of readings are possible when the text is a poetic text like Desanka Maksimović's poem "Premonition." Instead of a totalizing traditional interpretation of the poem as a love poem, Bošković offers a new antipatriarchal reading, which takes into account the radical "unreadability" (ambiguity) of all literary texts. In similar vein, but coming from an antifeminist position, Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover questions Gayatri Spivak's reading of Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* and claims the novel is a model of the structure of meaning, encoded in the embedded plot structure and the Oedipal drama through which the growing up of James Ramsay and the artist Lily Briscoe mirror each other in their respective processes of transformation. The contribution by Dragan Kujundžić also highlights the process of reading, using Aleksandar Tišma's literary work about the Holocaust as an exemplary textual model. Working with poststructural critical theorists such as Maurice Blanchot and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Kujundžić looks at the tension between the ethical necessity of testifying to the Holocaust and the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz.

The wars of the 1990s and the disintegration of Yugoslavia form the subtext of the next four contributions. Continuing with the representation of war and crimes against humanity, Radojka Vukčević presents a poignant testimony to the effects of war on children, using material from real-life diaries of children in the war zones of former Yugoslavia—Bosnia, Serb Krajina, and Kosovo—in the 1990s. These diaries have not been published to date. The theme of children and war is taken up by Tomislav Longinović, who writes about the trope of "looking for home" as something as old as Homeric times and as new as the postwar Yugoslav cultural scene. "Looking for home" becomes the new content of the postwar (1990s) children's experiences of displacement, represented by writers, filmmakers, and musicians, inscribed in adopted languages and in translation, which become the new "symbolic domain" of (a new) identity. Olga Nedeljković evokes the complex relationship between myth and history by revisiting the problem of the mythicization of the Kosovo Legend in the life of the Serbs in the 1990s. The author finds a correlation between the geopolitical destiny of the province of Kosovo in the present and the "defensive" and "nationalist" stance of the Serbs in the 21st century. The last paper in the Comparative Literature cluster belongs to film and cultural studies. Tatjana Aleksić examines the impact of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav ideology of "brotherhood" (and unity) on Serbian cinematography. The author finds

that Serbian films (1960s, 1970s, 1980s–90s) are representative of the “social shifts” in the ideology of “brotherhood,” with their subtexts grounded in an “economy of sacrifice.” The essay returns us to the theme of children as victims of the sins of the fathers.

The final contribution in the volume belongs to the realm of creative writing. It is a poem, written as a tribute to Rajka Gorup, by the Sorbonne professor Nina Živančević—poetess, prose writer, essayist, literary critic, and translator. The poem, entitled *The Island—Korkyra Negra*, refers to the Island of Korchula, known as Marco Polo’s island and called Korkyra Negra (Black Beauty) by the Romans. The poem is written in an Expressionist style, reminiscent of Elsa Lasker Schüller, who, like her generation of Modernist poets in Germany, Russia, and England, reintroduced the “female stanza” (Frauenstrophe), decoded as a woman’s declaration of passion for a man, which emerged in medieval European court lyrics. However, Nina Živančević’s declaration is not only a reminiscence about a passionate love affair of the past, presumably associated with the island. Her confession is also an indictment of friendship betrayed, which serves as a metaphor for the civil wars of the 1990s, fought on the territories of former friends and neighbors who belonged to a country called Yugoslavia. Nina Živančević’s poem is ultimately a lament, uttered on behalf of all of those who have ended up in the diasporas, following wars and revolutions which destroy the peace and tranquility of a people’s natural habitat. The poem is given in two versions—in the original Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) and in the poet’s own English translation—really a recomposition (*prepev*). The original version is particularly gripping and shows a verbal versatility equal to the best of Serbian Modernist and postmodern poetry.

The volume ends with two interviews with Rajka, one by Masha Udensiva-Brenner at Columbia University upon Rajka’s retirement, and the other by a reporter from the journal *Ovdje* in 1999. These interviews allow us to hear Rajka’s voice in this volume.