

Bojan Aleksov

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GREAT PEOPLE’S POET: JOVAN JOVANOVIĆ ZMAJ IN SERBIAN LITERATURE AND HISTORY

The recent violent outburst of Serbian nationalism has attracted significant interest in the ever-growing field of nationalism studies. In addition, the so-called cultural turn engaged scholars in the reappraisal of significant aspects of Serbian culture, namely the ones that make it national. Since no other aspect of national culture is believed to be more representative than its literary canon, two writers – Petar Petrović Njegoš and Ivo Andrić, the pillars of the Serbian literary canon, were naturally debated the most.¹ A number of studies relate the works of these authors to recent wars in the former Yugoslavia, dealing with them either as illustrations of eternal hatred or providing impetus for the conflicts.² Presenting a part of this debate to the international audience, Celia Hawkesworth believes that the main problem of the recent reassessment of major literary figures in former Yugoslavia is the inability of many commentators to separate political from artistic which I believe is both impossible and useless. After all, characters at stake here were not lonely riders but the spiritual and political leader of his (Montenegrin) state in the nineteenth and the highest diplomatic representative of another (Yugoslav) state in the twentieth century. Even more instrumental than their political positions was the influence of their literature on the political imagining and identity building in the last two centuries. Nonetheless, their influence was not a one-way and one-dimensional phenomenon but a historical process whose many aspects require serious investigation.

In Serbian, just like in any other case, political processes dominating the existing historiography of nation building cannot be understood without proper exploration of ideological and discursive practices of literature as well as modes of its canonization, which defined for individuals who they were and to whom they owed their loyalty. What and how we conceive of literature and literary criticism is rooted in a philological tradition, first formulated with the idea of nations in mind. It was precisely the political tasks of modern nationalism, according to Kedourie, that directed the course of literature, from the Romantic concepts of ‘folk character’ and ‘national language’ to the division of literature into distinct ‘national literatures’.³ In the formation of the national literary canon, which adopts or rejects writers and their works, national concerns often weighed as heavy as literary ones, albeit not in a linear

¹ Two recent articles in English summarize the debates around these two authors - Celia Hawkesworth, ‘Andrić as Red Rag and Political Football’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol, 80/2, April 2002, 201-216, and Andrew Baruch Wachtel, ‘How to use a classic: Petar Petrović Njegoš in the Twentieth Century’, in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, Budapest: CEU Press, 2004, 131-153.

² See Michael Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 and 1998, Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia. The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995, and Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, New York: New York University Press, 1999.

³ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Essex: Anchor Press, 1960, 63. For the overview of the connection of nationalism and literature among South Slavs see Albert B. Lord, ‘Nationalism in Slavic Literature’, in Charles and Barbara Jelavich, eds., *The Balkans in Transition. Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century*, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1974.

and conclusive process but in a dynamic, never-ending story of negotiation and modification.⁴ On the other hand, the rise of the modern nation-states was inseparable from the forms and subjects of imaginative literature.⁵ As Benedict Anderson demonstrated, literature participated in the formation of nations through the creation of print media, the newspaper and the novel, a crucial factor in its becoming, in his definition, an ‘imagined community’.⁶

In Central and Eastern Europe, including the Balkans, the political context of the unresolved national and state issues in the nineteenth century and the commonly belated and disputed development of the literary language differentiated the status of literature from its Western European counterparts. Consequently, the Romanticism, which offered the triumphant literary depiction of nationalism, in these parts of Europe lasted longer and painted literature and identity of their peoples almost until the end of the century. Another major difference is that the role played by the novel in national representation and dissemination in Western Europe was in many literatures of this region played by oral poetry and its imitation. Whereas in the West fiction, both as novel and short story, became the most dominant narrative form in much of Central and Eastern Europe the verse long prevailed even for the most complex epic functions.⁷ Poetry was valued more than any other genre of literature and it was in verse that artistic and creative minds were expected to express. A poet in the nineteenth century regarded himself as the conscience if not the leader of his (women poets in this period were exceptional) nation. Only nations of Central and Eastern Europe came close to the unique adoration of poets initiated in Germany and maybe best expressed in the rituals of the exhumation, translation and reburial of their bones, a practice that accords them saintly status. Serbian literature is one case in point. Serbian folk poetry as well as the poems written by romanticist poets in the ‘folk’ spirit were long privileged in national system of education and generally considered an expression or rather foundation of national culture. One poet, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (1833-1904), vaguely known outside Serbian/Croatian linguistic space, attained incomparable popularity, for which he was chosen for the topic of this study. Already during his life time Zmaj acquired the title of the people’s poet, esteem held by the common folk until our very days. A tireless publisher and editor of magazines and periodicals, in which he often contributed all the contents, Zmaj imbued the image of a poet as a national activist and acted as a key figure in the cultural and political life of Serbs in Hungary, Croatia and Serbia for the whole second half of the nineteenth century. Although politically active throughout his life and at the forefront of national activism, Zmaj is now usually remembered only as a poet and historical studies mention him only on the margins. Revisiting the life and deeds of a nineteenth century poet not so internationally known as Njegoš and Andrić, in this article I will attempt to trace and demonstrate the wider implications and ways narrative, ideological and political concerns of men of letters related to and informed the Serbian historical and literary discourse, which in turn are closely associated with

⁴ See György Kálmán, ‘Canonised Interpretations’, in Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, ed., *National Heritage – National Canon*, Budapest: Collegium Budapest Workshop Series, 2001, 95-106.

⁵ See Timothy Brennan, ‘The national longing for form’, in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990, 44-70.

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983, 12.

⁷ L. Szikláz, ‘The Popular Trend in the Romantic Literature of Some Central-European Nations’, in I. Sőtér, I. Neupokoyeva, eds., *European Romanticism*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977, 295-345, here 331-332.

ethno-national and nation-state legitimating narratives. Often citing as his ideal Victor Hugo, Zmaj never made the separation between his poetic and political expression and believed this would be artificial.⁸ Zmaj's unique popularity together with this expressed political engagement throughout his life inspired the first part of this study of the interplay of literature and politics in the context of the Serbian nation building. His ideas on the cluster of issues including language, people, state and religion will be reviewed in their historical context as well as against later attempts to adjust or abandon them if not fitting into the dominant national narrative. Already during Zmaj's life but especially after his death his place in the national canon was hailed but also questioned, not least because of his politics, which furnishes the fabric for the second part of the article. Taking the example of Zmaj and his oeuvre an effort will be made to demonstrate its many-sidedness as well as the transitory nature and even contingency of the paths of canonicity thereby rejecting the essentialist and deterministic view of a certain national culture or its cultural and political nationalism.

Zmaj

Jovan Jovanović was born in 1833, to a distinguished family in Novi Sad, then a predominantly Serbian town in South Hungary.⁹ His father came from a merchant family of Tsintsar (Vlach from southern Balkans) origin and served as senator and shortly as a mayor after the 1848 revolution. Neither Jovan Jovanović nor any of his contemporaries ever contemplated his Vlach origins, which leaves us to assume that the family was fully assimilated or Serbianized.¹⁰ One can only speculate, based on the sheer number of assimilated Vlachs as pronounced figures in national movements in the Southeastern Europe (including Hungary and Romania), that their origin and the need to prove oneself as part of the majority people contributed to their role of conspicuous nineteenth century Balkan nationalists. The only hint at Jovan Jovanović's non-Serbian origins might be his biblical name (Jovan-John). Already in 1814, in the introduction to his first collection of folk poems, Vuk Karadžić condemned the fashion among Serbs in Hungary to name their children with Greek and Jewish instead of national and Slavic names. This call was followed by many Serbian writers or national political activists (especially those of Tsintsar origin), who changed or Serbianized their originally Greek or Hebraic names. This was the case with the famous Serbian linguist Đura Daničić, previously Georgije Popović, or the leader of the Serbian Liberal Party in Hungary Svetozar Miletić, baptized Avram, or Serbian Prime Minister and historian Stojan Novaković, baptized Kosta, to name just

⁸ Vaso Milinčević, 'Zmaj i Viktor Igo', in idem, *Tvorci i tumači. Iz srpskog romantizma*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1984, 229-237.

⁹ Biographies of Zmaj include Vasa Stajić, *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1933; Mladen Leskovic, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj', *Književnost*, Vol. 12, 1954; and Živan Milisavac, *Zmaj*, Belgrade, 1954. Short summaries in Gerhard Steiner, ed., *Lexikon der Weltliteratur*, Leipzig: Veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1965, 386-387, and Rudolf Radler, *Kindlers Neues Literatur Lexikon*, Band 8, München: Kindler Verlag, 1990, 898-899. For Zmaj's life and poetry contextualized in wider European context of Romanticism see Peter Rehder, 'Die romantische Literatur der Kroaten und Serben', in Norbert Aletenhofer, Alfred Estermann, eds., *Europäische Romantik III*, Wiesbaden: Aula Verlag, 1985, 534-544 and Lord, 'Nationalism in Slavic Literature', 281-282.

¹⁰ Historian and Jovanović's schoolmate Ilarion Ruvarac wrote that Jovanović's mother determined his proper Serbian upbringing. Quoted in Jovan Vukčević, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj i Srpska akademija nauka', *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, 1983, 463- 470, here 465.

a few.¹¹ Jovan Jovanović did not change his name but acquired what is probably the most popular nick name among prominent Serbs – Zmaj (dragon), which was the name of one of many journals he edited. Later in his life he also introduced himself as Čika Jova – Uncle Jova, a dear uncle to all Serbian children, to all Serbs. After his death, Čika Jova Zmaj became a household name, the emblem of his work and symbol of his closeness to the people.

Although Zmaj's biography is often mythologized, his career hardly differed from any other urban middle class son of his native Hungary at the time. He attended several high schools throughout the country, which was usual at the time, and studied law at universities in Budapest, Prague, and Vienna before starting his career as civil servant. In 1867 he abandoned his post as the head of the Serbian educational foundation Tekelijanum/ Tökölyanum in Pest in order to take a degree in medicine, which he practiced for the rest of his life moving from Novi Sad to Pančevo, Karlovci, Futog, all predominantly Serbian towns in South Hungary, and later to Belgrade, Zagreb and Vienna. As a physician he was remembered as the champion of the poor, whom he did not charge for his services.¹² Still, Zmaj physician could not prevent that in less than ten years of his marriage all his five children and eventually his wife succumb to diseases rampaging at that time, most ubiquitously the tuberculosis. The tragedy of Zmaj's family brought him more than anything else the sympathy of the common people, who were still dying mercilessly of known and unknown diseases, poverty, the lack of hygiene or medical attention. From then on, according to Zmaj's own words, his heart was filled with pains of his people, of all those who suffer and whose dignity is humiliated.¹³ Zmaj thus became a myth already during his lifetime, although the full force of the myth surfaced only after his death, as we will see later, when he was no longer able to influence his own image.

Parallel to his medical practice, from mid-1850s to his death in 1904, Zmaj was the most prolific and active Serbian man of letters. He was an editor and publisher of numerous literary and satirical journals, a writer of short stories and plays, and most importantly a poet. Zmaj's contribution as a translator is not lesser either. Beginning with Hungarian poets Petőfi and Toldi and later translating major European poets such as Goethe, Bodenstädt, Tennyson, Lermontov and Hugo, he enriched tremendously the Serbian literature even though his translations are not held in high esteem any longer by literary critics. His own massive poetic opus is heterogeneous in its themes and genres but also of varied and disputed artistic value. Commonly praised are his lyrical, love and family poems published in collections named *Đulići* (Roses, 1864) and *Đulići uveoci* (Faded Roses 1882). Here is one example of these light romantic verses echoing Heine:

*Tell me, tell!*¹⁴

¹¹ M. Đ. Miličević, *Znameniti ljudi u srpskog naroda koji su preminuli do kraja 1900*, Beograd, 1901, 80.

¹² The testimony to this fact is the add for his medical practice in *Zastava* 138, 25.11.1870, published in *Odlomci Zmajeve autobiografije* [Excerpts from Zmaj's Autobiography], Sremski Karlovci: Izdanje društva Zmaj, 1933, 39.

¹³ R. Vrhovac, 'Zmaj-Jovan Jovanović', *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol, 107/337, 1-3 July-September 1933, 1-24, here 6.

¹⁴ This authorship of this translation is not acknowledged. Available on <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Jovan+Jovanovic+Zmaj>, 28.11.2005.

Tell me, tell,
How should I call you;
Tell me, which
Name I should give you, -
Will I my "pride"
Or my "strength" veneer,
Or will I "treasure"
Or "my little deer",
Will I "soul",
or "my dear" -
Tell me, which
name I should give you!
Each of these is a sweet
And beautiful name
with which a Serb
His gold will nickname;
But I would spend
One whole life
Searching for beautier,
Prouder and sweeter,
Dearer name,
yet unheard by world
to call with it
my flower yet furred.

Whereas *Roses* is a lyrical diary or poetic novel about love and happy family life, *Faded Roses* is a book full of sadness and grief, inspired by the death of his wife and children. In addition Zmaj published following poem collections: *Pevanija* (Poems, 1882), *Čika Jova srpskoj deci* (Uncle Jova to Serbian children, 1889), *Čika Jova srpskoj omladini* (Uncle Jova to Serbian Youth, 1901) *Snohvatice* (Vol I-II 1895, Vol. III 1900) and *Devesilje* (1900).¹⁵ The poems in these collections inaugurated Zmaj, in words of a literary critic Jovan Skerlić at the beginning of the twentieth century, into a program poet and freedom singer that was at the same time the poet of hatred and revenge of the Serbian people and the dreamer of human brotherhood, world peace and better humanity.¹⁶ In this respect Zmaj stood clearly in line of *Jungen Deutschland* movement or one of his greatest poetic inspirations - Petőfi for whom pure love emotion was not allowed and who saw the love of the people as the true task of the poet. Even though Zmaj did not write many expressly patriotic poems, he was a master of political and satirical poetry in which he expressed his political ideas and visions of the nation.

By the time Zmaj entered adulthood and began writing, a constitutive or scholarly or A phase of the Serbian nationalism, according to Miroslav Hroch's periodization, gave way to what could be termed as nationalism in action to which Zmaj dedicated his whole self. Following European models, Serbian poets at the time similarly saw themselves as speakers of the nation. Literary clubs transformed in first national political organizations and parties, where former literature lovers practiced their political skills with more or less success but always passing the same path from

¹⁵ Collected works appeared in 16 volumes as Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, *Sabrana dela*, Belgrade, 1933-1937, and selected works appeared in Novi Sad in 8 volumes in 1969, and in 10 volumes in 1983, edited by Mladen Leskovac.

¹⁶ Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti*, Belgrade: Rad, 1953, first ed. 1914, 289.

literature into politics. This shortcut to ‘glory’ prompted one contemporary to lament how over night many Serbian poets became the worst political demagogues.¹⁷

Zmaj’s birthplace Novi Sad, a free town with the largest Serbian population in the Habsburg Monarchy, developed during the first half of the nineteenth century to the center of Serbian cultural life, earning the title of Serbian ‘Athens’. Nowadays it is often forgotten that the most important role in the nineteenth century Serbian nation building was played by Serbs from Hungary with Zmaj in its midst for almost half a century. Politically he grew supporting the liberal United Serbian Youth and then the first political party of Serbs in Hungary – Serbian People’s Freethinking Party (Liberals) led by Svetozar Miletić, who remained Zmaj’s political idol until the end of his life. He was a party poet, his poems often resembled daily political chronicles or as writer Veljko Petrović nicely put it - emotional, versified commentary of Miletić’s political concepts.¹⁸ At one point in the eighteen eighties, it seemed that Zmaj would even take over the role of Miletić and become the political leader of Serbs in Hungary but this attempt failed as he obviously had no adequate skills and soon returned to editing political journals, where he had more experience.¹⁹ Yet Zmaj’s poetry and especially his journalistic work remained intertwined with political issues of the time especially the most pressing one – the state of the nation, providing us with important insights in the interplay of literature and politics. What follows is a reconstruction of Zmaj’s political and poetic persona based on his writings and actions. In this enterprise, naturally limited to few major topics, one must begin with Zmaj’s understanding of the language, which determined not only the style of his poetry but also his political views.

Language and Nation

Despite studying in German and Hungarian Zmaj never acquired such proficiency to be able to write and express himself in these languages. Hardly any other Serbian writer ever did so.²⁰ For Zmaj, the Serbian language remained his symbolic homeland and the guiding principle of his nationalism. Without education in his mother tongue but obsessed with its beauty, Zmaj paradoxically became one of the most remarkable philologists of the Serbian language, master of rhyme, creator of neologisms, and certainly its most ardent glorifier. At the same time, the lack of proper linguistic knowledge and Zmaj’s exaggerated passion for his language often turned to disadvantage of form or expression and hence, the later criticism of much carelessness and slovenliness in his work.

Zmaj entered Serbian literature after a long period of the “discovery” of the Serbian language, namely the creation of literary language based on vernacular. This story is

¹⁷ At one point at the end of nineteenth century almost all Serbian political leaders were former poets. Jaša Tomić in Hungary, Jaša Prodanović in Serbia, Petar Kočić in Bosnia and Svetozar Pribičević in Croatia. From the letter of Pavle Aršinov, quoted in Lazar Rakić, ‘Zmaj i Jaša Tomić’, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, Vol, 32, 1985, 71-98, here 94.

¹⁸ Veljko Petrović in *Narodna enciklopedija* 2, 168-169.

¹⁹ Stajić, *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj*, 134.

²⁰ Zmaj’s longtime literary companion Laza Kostić wrote several poems in German. Writing in a language other than the mother tongue is rare in literature in general though examples of Kundera or Canetti come immediately to one’s mind.

told elsewhere so here it will be only shortly summarized.²¹ Subjugated for centuries, Serbs could not develop the language of government, commerce and law, as they were excluded from these spheres of life, and their language abated for personal use of largely rural peasant population. The only institution which had kept alive a written form of the language was the Church, but it also fell under the strong influence of the Russian liturgical language, as it imported both books and teachers from Russia. In such circumstances, within the relatively free Serbian Church in the Habsburg monarchy, developed a hybrid language called Slaveno-serbski, that was different from the vernacular both in vocabulary and syntax and whose alphabet was also not appropriate as it contained letters for nonexistent sounds in Serbian and lacked the letters for some sounds which did exist. When Vuk Karadžić attempted to institute the vernacular, to which he translated the New Testament and developed a new appropriate orthography, as written and literary language, a strong opposition came from the Church. The language and orthography reform were taken as an attack on the existing liturgical language of the Church, which principally affected the standing of the Church as the carrier of the eternal truth but also as the most powerful political and social institution of the Serbs and indeed their representative in the Monarchy.

By putting an end to the exclusive rule of the old Slaveno-Serbian language and by raising the popular dialect to a status of Serbian literary language Karadžić opened the way for the new period in Serbian cultural and literary development commonly associated with European Romanticism. Karadžić's second contribution lay in inaugurating among the Serbs the vogue of folklore collection that reigned throughout Europe. The celebration of the autochthonous features of the nation and the originality of its folk poetry was established in Western Europe in the eighteenth century by Rousseau, Macpherson, Percy and Herder in particular, and reached eastward through Vienna or German universities. The famous passage from Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, at the end of a chapter devoted to the Slavonic peoples, where he painted a picture of these peoples so close to the ideal vision of the Enlightenment is usually considered to have had the longest lasting impact on the emerging national literatures of many peoples in Central and Eastern Europe.²² Another profound influence on early Slavists, who instigated Karadžić's work such as Josef Dobrovský and especially Jernej Kopitar, was that of the historical synthesis based on the identification of the people and language, offered by German philologist August Ludwig Schlözer.²³ Cherishing European-wide enthusiasm for

²¹ See Wilson Duncan, *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, 1787-1864: Literacy, Literature, and National Independence in Serbia*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1986. Emanuel Turczynski in his *Konfession und Nation. Zur Frühgeschichte der serbischen und rumänischen Nationsbildung*, Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1976, compares the early Serbian and Romanian nation building dedicating much attention to issues of language use and standardization, whereas Claudia Hopf, *Sprachnationalismus in Serbien und Griechenland. theoretische Grundlagen sowie ein Vergleich von Vuk Stefanović Karadžić und Adamantios Korais*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997, compares Serbian and Greek case.

²² See Holm Sundhaussen, *Der Einfluß der Herderschen Ideen auf die Nationsbildung bei der Völkern der Habsburger Monarchie*, München: Oldenbourg, 1973, and Wolfgang Kessler, 'J. G. Herder bei Serben und Kroaten bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts', in Peter Andraschke, Helmut Loos, ed., *Ideen und Ideale: Johann Gottfried Herder in Ost und West*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2002.

²³ See Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, 'Langue et Histoire. L'Europe centrale entre l'érudition et la tradition 1760-1810 ou quelques réflexions autour de Schlözer, Herder, Dobrovský et Dobner', in Frédéric Barbier, ed., *Est-Ouest: transferts et réceptions dans le monde du livre en Europe XVIe-XXe siècle*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2005, 256-276.

Karadžić's collections, the whole generation of poets, which adopted Karadžić's language reform and kept alive his legacy, became known as Vuk's Youth or *Vukovci* with Zmaj at the forefront of the movement. Later on, another famous poet, Jovan Dučić, maintained that the whole second half of the nineteenth century could be termed as Zmaj's period in the Serbian poetry.²⁴ An important aspect of the movement was the purification of the language, with poets desperately seeking and inventing words to replace foreign imports. Ardent student of folklore in all its forms, Zmaj not only collected folk songs and stories but also contributed more than 3000 words for the Dictionary of the Serbian Academy.²⁵ In his essays and obituaries for Karadžić Zmaj maintained folk song was not only the root of his but, as he also believed, the poetry in general.²⁶ He grew up in a world where "singing" or the so-called song verse meant lyric poetry and verse romances stood for epic poetry for centuries.²⁷ These Serbian oral narratives were composed in the traditional decasyllable poetic line and sung accompanied by playing upon a single-stringed instrument known as the *gusle*.²⁸ In the nineteenth century they might be no longer sung but their versification and prosody endured and the wider public considered poetry only that which preserved the "singing" tradition. Zmaj's incomparable popularity too rested on his use of symmetrical eight syllable verse and epic decasyllable that is successful adapting of the meter of Serbian folk lyrics to his own poems.²⁹ The taste and the expectations of the audience directed the authors such as Zmaj to adjust and harmonize their genres and forms with those of the folk poetry even when its origins were far apart in time, space and cultural background. New metric forms if not fully dependent on national specificity of language were the result of the interaction of traditional poetic forms of one language with foreign influences and individual creativity of poets or poetic styles. Zmaj's devotion to verse is evident in its use in genres other than poetry.³⁰ Even his journalistic work or his commentaries to social and political events were generally expressed in verse. Zmaj accepted not just the meter and verse but the lexica and idiomatic as well as the poetic syntax and expression of the folk poetry. He also made use of trochaic line, a strong caesura and other elements and mnemonic artifices of the oral epic to revive a rhythm and verse known to every Serb. Furthermore, his lyrics reflect abundantly the South Slavic folk cosmogony. In Zmaj's poems personal feelings are interwoven with nature and dissipated into it, idyllic landscapes are supplanted by gloomy autumnal scenes, visions of nothingness, and apathy - poetry that easily found readers among

²⁴ Jovan Dučić, 'Aleksa Šantić', in idem, *Moji saputnici, Sabrana dela 4*, Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1969, 153.

²⁵ Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 139-142.

²⁶ Idem, 55.

²⁷ L. Szikláz, 'The Popular Trend in the Romantic Literature of Some Central-European Nations' in Sötér, Neupokoyeva, ed., *European Romanticism*, 295-345.

²⁸ One of the most recent collections in English is *Songs of the Serbian people: from the collections of Vuk Karadžić*, translated and edited by Milne Holton and Vasa D.

Mihailovich, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. The best study on the Serbian epic in English is Svetozar Koljevic, *The Epic in the Making*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

²⁹ See Dragiša Živković, 'Zmajev stih' [Zmaj's Verse], in idem, *Tokovi srpske književnosti: od klasicizma i bidermajera do ekspresionizma*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska 1991, 69-80, and Jovan Jerković, 'Narodna književnost i Zmajeve "Snohvatice"' in idem, *Jezik i pisci*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1991.

³⁰ Zmaj's early attempts to write prose were rare and deserved very little attention. They include short prose *Naš Ljubomir* in 1858, epic novel *Vidosava Brankovićeva* in 1860, comedy *Šaran* in 1864, few recollections, announcements in his journals, correspondence and his testament.

the common people, who, with the rise of literacy, for the first time joined the world of letters.

On the other hand Zmaj's poems, which originated in a very different poetic and social context than the one that generated folk poetry, often produced dubious results. Especially Zmaj's attempt to imitate folk poetry in *Ijekavica* variant of the *Stokavian* dialect of Hercegovina, instituted by Karadžić as the purest form of Serbian language, resulted in many lapses and errors in word form, syntax and unhappy word choice. Zmaj, recorded for having said that Serbian is not an earthly but heavenly language, wanted to stay aloof of the debate waged throughout the nineteenth century about the proper grammar, orthography and lexica of the newly codified vernacular language. He also rejected demands for linguistic purity among Serbian and Croatian writers, which later paved the way for the formation of their separate national literatures and identity.³¹ In his idealism, Zmaj was a hostage of the Romanticist ideal, which viewed, to quote Joshua Fishman:

... the language as the key to unlocking ethnic greatness and the subsequent development of dynamic solutions to all the problems of the modern era. The ethnic vernaculars were claimed to be great, liberating, unifying and authenticating phenomena and the validity of these claims was real and moving despite externalist-objectivist ideals to the contrary.³²

It is therefore interesting to see how Zmaj's romanticist idealization of the language and poetic tradition of the people influenced his understanding of the perennial problem of the territorial and national appropriation of that language. There is no better example than Zmaj's attitude towards Croats.

Zmaj and Croats

Accepting Karadžić's interpretation of Serbian and Croatian as one language, Zmaj deemed Serbs and Croats one people with two names or "brothers of one blood" and "sons of one mother".³³ Hence he was very concerned with political developments in Croatia, the biggest region/autonomy in the Habsburg Monarchy inhabited by his mother tongue speakers, to which he felt close regardless of what faith they professed. During the period of the early eighties, when the agreement between Hungary and Croatia, the so-called *Nagodba*, was renegotiated to the detriment of the Croatian autonomy, Zmaj, together with other fellow Serbian Liberals from Hungary, vociferously demanded the closest possible political links between the Serbs and Croats in order to resist Hungarian interference. He placed his poetic talent in the service of that aim, extolling brotherhood, unity and harmony between Serbs and Croats. In the show of resistance to Hungarian aspirations Zmaj wrote:

The more threatening your spectre,
The stronger our faith

³¹ See for example Ljubomir Nedić's furious rejection of Croatian "imports" in the Serbian literary language, 'Hrvaština u srpskom jeziku' [Croatism in Serbian language], *Zora*, 1900/8-9.

³² Joshua A. Fishman, 'Social Theory and Ethnicity: Language and Ethnicity in Eastern Europe,' in Peter Sugar, ed., *Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Eastern Europe*, Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1980, 76.

³³ As expressed in Zmaj's poem *Kad već mora*, written in 1884, published in *Odabrana dela, Političke i satirične pesme II*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1975, 48-49.

Which hunger will not shake.
A heroic people will not change their faith
In days of trials.
We trust in our stalwart hearts,
We rely on fraternal bonds,
We follow the Serbian and Croatian star.³⁴

Zmaj's counterpart in promoting unity among Serbs and Croats was the greatest Croatian novelist at the time August Šenoa. Praising Zmaj's poetry in 1879, Šenoa was persuaded that there is hope "that from today's sad quarrel among the members of one tribe, Croats and Serbs, one day something better and nobler might arise based on mutual familiarity, recognition and respect."³⁵ Šenoa further warned against:

Various political quarrels among Croats and Serbs from which unfortunately only foreigners profit and we suffer. This political antipathy might be resolved only in time and with education and we should not allow it to influence science, art and literature. Sober man who has not lost his mind in fanaticism, who considers the development of our people from above, will recognize that it is our mutual interest to create one cultural circle against Germans, Hungarians and Italians – and this should be the task of nonpolitical literature. There should cease all exclusivity and reign mutual comprehension.³⁶

As years went by the similar voices of prominent Serbian and Croatian artists and poets had little effect because the political and clerical representatives of two peoples could not reconcile their interests and instead chose rather separate political and national paths. Almost all Croatian parties and groupings denied Serbs any separate national rights in Croatia, whereas Serbs supporting the Hungarian government party made impossible any progress in Croatian statehood. In his verses Zmaj clearly distanced himself from the mainstream line of Serbian politics in Croatia. He supported the Croatian struggle against Magyarization and urged the Serbs to help Croats without trying to gain advantages from the Croats' difficulties exhorting:

Tender a hand to the suffering Croat,
Tell him he has a brother in need;
Let brotherly love show its benefits true,
And then let them decide what they want to do.³⁷

When Orthodox bishops and Serbian elites represented in the Croatian parliament remained hesitant and doubtful about the cooperation and reconciliation between Serbs and Croats and did not heed his advice the poet lamented:

The keys were in Serbian hand,
But to Serbs was this too much a burden

³⁴ From 'Veroispovest Alvadžija', *Žiža*, No. 10, 1872,. Quoted in Vasilije Krestić, *History of the Serbs in Croatia and Slavonia 1848-1914*, translated by Margot and Boško Milosavljević Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1997, 206.

³⁵ Cited in Milorad Živančević, 'Šenoa i Zmaj', *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol. 31/III, 1983, 427-433, here 433. Originally written in 1879.

³⁶ Cited in idem, 430.

³⁷ The verses initially published in Zmaj's journal *Starmali* caused a storm of enthusiasm in Zagreb and were reprinted in Croatian journals *Pozor* and *Vijenac*. Here quoted from Krestić, *History of the Serbs in Croatia and Slavonia 1848-1914*, 318.

So they locked themselves up first
And then gave the keys to Khuen.³⁸

Infuriated with these lines, a bitter opponent of Zmaj's ideal of national unity, Teofan Živković, Serbian Bishop in Croatia wrote:

Zmaj would have done better to have kept silent. These people should first travel around these parts, and then write poems or hold speeches. If they cannot, they should at least read *Srbski list* (journal close to the clericalists) to know whether reconciliation is possible at all, and why it has not taken place.³⁹

Srbski narod, journal close to Serbian Patriarch Anđelić, even accused Zmaj of inciting anti-Hungarian rebellion in Croatia in 1883.⁴⁰ In spite of the misapprehension, Zmaj remained instrumental in attempts to overcome bitter relations between Croats and Serbs. For his record of promoting of cooperation and accord, he was courted by Croatian bishop Strossmayer, counts Drašković and other prominent Croatian opponents of Hungarian rule asking him to persuade Serbian Liberal leaders into electoral coalition.⁴¹ Zmaj responded positively through a number of intercession but also worked on his own, agitating among the Serbian and Croatian youth for the fear that some heedless nationalist youngsters spoil the efforts of elders at reconciliation. Yet Zmaj was not a politician and his role in negotiations did not secure any success of the negotiations which were determined by the already existent antagonism. Furthermore, party calculations and squabbles, coalitions over material gains or a single deputy position pushed Serbian and Croatian parties for decades away from any collaboration.

In 1887, with the financial help of the Montenegrin Prince Nikola, Zmaj attempted to start the journal *Jugoslavija*, the first with such name ever, aimed at propagating the union of Balkan peoples and lands, but this effort failed before even the first issue appeared. Disagreeing with Zmaj's idealist attempts, Croatian bishop Strossmayer wrote "Zmaj is just a poet and nothing more. About politics he does not understand a thing!"⁴² A year later, we find Zmaj among the group of prominent Serbian writers and politicians that accepted the offer made by a group of Croatian notables for a joint declaration stating that "Croats and Serbs are two tribes of one people, with both tribes having their individual national-political development, which resulted in the appearance of two names for the people – Serbian and Croatian, which are both justified, existed for centuries and have the same right in signifying and symbolizing our united people with those two names."⁴³ Although long negotiated, the declaration was rejected by political parties. One failure after the other must have saddened Zmaj

³⁸ Cited in Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 85. Zmaj was dismayed that the Serbs voted for pro-Government candidates convinced that this could secure Serbian rights in Croatia, which in fact only secured pro-Hungarian rule in Croatia for decades personified by Hungarian imposed governor, Ban Khuen-Héderváry, the chief addressee of many of Zmaj's satirical verses.

³⁹ From the letter written in 1883 and quoted in Krestić, History of the Serbs in Croatia and Slavonia 1848-1914, 320.

⁴⁰ Idem, 318.

⁴¹ Idem, 359-363.

⁴² *Korespondencija Rački-Štrosmajer* 3 Zagreb, 1930, 325. Out of low opinion Štrosmajer had for Zmaj as a politician Krestić made a conclusion that their idea of Yugoslavism was different and that in fact Štrosmajer had only Great Croatia in mind. See Vasilije Krestić, 'Zmaj i Hrvati', Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju, Vol, 36, 1987, 27-55.

⁴³ Quoted in Vasilije Krestić, *Iz istorije Srba i srpsko-hrvatskih odnosa*, Belgrade: BIGZ, 1994, 216.

deeply. His travel to Dalmatia might be an illustration of this frustration. Zmaj hardly ever travelled and was already fifty five when in 1888, he first saw the Adriatic sea and visited all the major towns on the coast between Trieste to Montenegro.⁴⁴ Still, Zmaj, who was sort of a scriboman, didn't leave any note or remark about these visits, prompting us to assume that the lack of unity he witnessed among Serbs and Croats along the coast discouraged him from writing.

In his last attempt to foster rapprochement between Serbs and Croats in 1897, Zmaj even moved to Zagreb. Still hoping to do justice and reconcile the two peoples he coined the term Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serb for his people, which was odd at the time but was later in Socialist Yugoslavia accepted as the official name for the language. Criticizing the anti-Croatian editorial policy of the Serbian journal in Zagreb, Zmaj rejected the explanation of the editors that they just responded to attacks from Croats and opined:

Serbs and Croats live one next to another and together for centuries. Rarely have they lived in one state or in one independent Serbian or Croatian state. Living in a foreign state has led to differences in upbringing, characteristics of people, its views and preferences. Yet the most remarkable feature of a people is a language it speaks. And as Đura Daničić scientifically established the language of Serbs and Croats is one and the same – Serbocroatian. This fact is much more important than all attempts of Vienna and Pest to instill hostility among brothers who are destined by their closeness to live and grow together. Vienna is not capable to enlist all Croatian leaders and parties for its aims, nor can it capture Croatian peasant and as long as this is so I have no fears that it could separate us. We need only to keep our strength for better times to come. If I had no faith in the essence and better generations of Croats I would never come to live in their midst. Just because Vienna is trying to use the slightest opportunity to embitter the relations between Croats and Serbs we have to remain moderate towards Croats. I believe in courage, energy and strength of Serbs and Croats to resist; I believe in great Slavic soul that will be able to extinguish inflamed passions and reconcile disparate positions.⁴⁵

Tragically and absurdly the divisions between the Serbian and Croatian political circles erupted into riots in June 1899, in Zagreb, on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Zmaj's literary work. Serbian nationalists in Croatia organized the celebrations ignoring the Croats and staged an event in Plitvice resort, which they called Serbian Plitvice in the invitation.⁴⁶ In the speeches Zmaj was celebrated as the best symbol under which to achieve the most solid unity of Serbian lands and his collections were praised as the Gospel of Serbian patriotism and honesty. In Zagreb, Croatian nationalists did everything to prevent the celebrations. The activists of the extreme Right, the so-called Frankists, staged demonstrations and attacked Serbian institutions in Zagreb. Their attempts to violently disrupt the celebrations were deterred by representatives of the Serbian and Croatian youth of Dalmatia, in what turned out to be the first demonstration of the future albeit short lasting united national struggle of the two peoples. After the ill-famed anniversary Zmaj withdrew to Kamenica, a town across Danube from his native Novi Sad, and until his death wrote mostly poems for children. It was only after Zmaj's death in

⁴⁴ Mladen Leskovac, 'Zmaj u Dalmaciji i Dubrovniku 1888', in idem, *Srpske književne teme*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1988, 103-111.

⁴⁵ Cited in Krestić, 'Zmaj i Hrvati', 46.

⁴⁶ Krestić, *History of the Serbs in Croatia and Slavonia 1848-1914*, 387-389.

1904, that the initiatives aimed at the political and cultural unification of South Slavs got sway with the First Yugoslav Artistic Exhibit and the First Congress of Southern Slav Youth, which the favorite political circumstances in the following years transformed in the widespread movement among the South Slav cultural elites ending up in the creation of the Yugoslav state after the First World War.⁴⁷

From today's perspective Zmaj's life itinerary as a symbolic path of unity between Zagreb and Belgrade seems to have been an aberration in the trend whereby the two cities grew to clearly distinct cultural and literary centers. Zmaj's belief in the naturalistic determinism of language as the key national identity marker posed a serious problem in Serbian-Croatian context. As Ivo Banac remarked:

The unique Croat dialectical situation, that is the use of three distinct dialects... could not be reconciled with the romantic belief that language was the most profound expression of the national spirit. Obviously one nation could not have three spirits, nor could one dialect be shared by two nationalities. It followed, therefore, that regardless of what their actual national consciousness might be, all *stokavian* speaking peoples were Serbs.⁴⁸

The problem was worsened with Serbian nationalists' assertion that the Croatian is just a dialect of Serbian and that all speakers of Serbian, from Kosovo to South Hungary, and from Serbia to Slavonia, Croatia, and Dalmatia, are Serbian.⁴⁹ Zmaj shared this assertion though, as we saw, he was ready to accept the individuality of Croats for the sake of unity especially in view of foreign threats. Nevertheless, he opined that belonging to Serbian nation should replace religious identification of all Serbian (or Serbo-Croatian) speakers, extending it to Muslim Bosnyaks as well, as expressed in his poem with appropriate title 'My motto,' published in his last collection of poems:

Looking into Serbian past,
Sensing its present day
Thinking on what can come
In the future ahead of us

All my thought during the day
And all my dreams at night
Let me tell you, oh brothers,
I fear no faith can divide us.

So let it be three faiths,
This is no danger for Serbdom
But let only one love be among us
One love and one hope.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ For cultural developments in Serbia favoring the unification see Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric, 'The Roles of Jovan Skerlic, Steven Mokranjac, and Paja Jovanovic in Serbian Cultural History, 1900-1914', *Slavic Review*, Vol, 47/4, 1988, 687-701.

⁴⁸ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, 81.

⁴⁹ This was officially promulgated in Serbian textbooks until WWI. See Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalism and Yugoslav Union before 1914*, Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 1990.

⁵⁰ Cited in Laza Kostić, *O Jovanu Jovanoviću Zmaju*, Sombor, 1902, 436. All translations are mine except when otherwise acknowledged.

Eventually dialectical variations, the use of different (Cyrillic or Latin) alphabets as well as the distinct historical, religious and political background of Serbian and Croatian literatures kept them apart despite the fact that linguistically Serbian and Croatian were, in the opinion of most people and experts, one language, and their speakers lived on adjacent territory. But one need not look from today's perspective to write off Zmaj's understanding of identity based on language as political naïveté. At the peak of Zmaj's language enthusiasm Ernest Renan in his famous speech on the nation pointed out:

Languages are historical formations, which tell us very little about the blood of those who speak them and which, in any case, could not shackle human liberty when it is a matter of deciding the family with which one unites oneself for life or for death.⁵¹

Rejecting language together with race, religion, geography or any other singular denominator of the nation, Renan stressed that the exclusive concern with language encloses and limits oneself, abandons the vast field of human spirit, reason and moral. Despite the belief that the language was the most important and organic component of an ethnic cluster, in many cases throughout Europe it was not the ultimate or crucial factor in unification or ethnic homogenization. The belief that the people is the community of language, which is the only one that has the right to political sovereignty, was superseded and substituted by theories of peoples as communities of ancient historic statehoods. These theories dominated post-revolutionary Hungary as exemplified in the interpretation of Joseph Eötvös, in his *Der Einfluss der herrschenden Ideen des 19. Jahrhundert auf den Staat*, which later also influenced political thinking in Croatia.⁵² In the case of South Slavs, the language not only failed to bring about unification or ethnic homogenization but, according to linguist Ranko Bugarski, the struggle over the language, which lasted for almost two centuries, acted as a cover for other deep-seated conflicts and aspirations of political and economic nature.⁵³ Let us now see how Zmaj shaped and was shaped by other political currents of the time and how posterity kept his legacy.

Romanticist Nationalism and Liberalism

Romanticism, which fashioned whole Zmaj's oeuvre, was the first artistic movement into which the small nations could proudly take part since it praised their epic and liberation struggle, documented in their folk poetry. The folk poetry was praised as People's Gospel, whereas Zmaj's contemporary, poet Jovan Ilić, defined it as: "the base of people's poetic temple, in which young and old, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, can pray to his own and not foreign God."⁵⁴ The formal and conceptual elements, the imagery and subject matter of folk poetry no matter how traditionalist and conservative, offered new modes of expression and enabled the new generation of

⁵¹ Ernest Renan in a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?', quoted from 'What is a nation?' in Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, 17.

⁵² Joseph Freiherrn von Eötvös, *Der Einfluss der herrschenden Ideen des 19. Jahrhundert auf den Staat*, Wien, 1851. Milorad Ekmečić elaborated the influence of this notion among South Slavs in *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790-1918 [Creation of Yugoslavia 1790-1918]*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989.

⁵³ Ranko Bugarski, 'Overview of the linguistic aspects of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia', in Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth, eds., *Language in the Former Yugoslav Lands*, Bloomington, In: Slavica Publishers, 2004, 4.

⁵⁴ Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 142.

poets to defy the ecclesiastical and other constraints. Furthermore, because of its alleged continuity the folk poetry served the best to recall the mythologized past. In a not unique development in this part of Europe, for the lack of independent political fora, a poet overtook this function and found folklore to be useful political means in their struggle for independent culture and indirectly independent national existence. Celebrating the vitality of the people and glory of its past Romanticism justified revolutionary nationalist aims expressed in poetic terms of awakening, rise and revival.⁵⁵ Vladimir Ćorović gave a picturesque description of this period in Serbian history:

Eighteen sixties were the peak of romantic nationalism among Serbs in Hungary, the greatest poets, the cult of the revival of medieval Empire, unification of Serbdom, ideal Serb imbued with national spirit. The ideal Serb was supposed to wear folk costume, maintain the cult of folk poems and customs, to love all that is Serbian and reject all that is foreign. All major journals and political newspapers were formed and Novi Sad became the Serbian spiritual and political center, Serbian Athens, imprinting influence on all later Serbian scholars and literati.⁵⁶

This was also the period of the rise of the Serbian political liberalism, to which Zmaj immediately avowed and which evolved as a hybrid of the western prototype and the indigenous romantic populism drawing upon the glorification of the traditional democratic “popular” institutions with national liberation as its major concern.⁵⁷ Influenced by German Romanticism, Serbian Liberals’ national conception emphasized an organic complex of historical elements that make up the spirit of a people such as race, language, religion, customs, etc., as opposed to Liberal contractualism. The idea of folk poetry as the manifestation of true spirit of the people was translated in the political vision of popular democracy. For the Serbian liberals, the major ideas of the liberal doctrine - parliamentary government, equality, rule of law, responsible executive, etc were derivative of the crucial notion of the popular sovereignty. Patriarchal institutions, such as the extended family, rural community, local self-government, collective work, and the collectivistic ethos which they nurtured, were all politically instrumentalized as legitimating devices.

Different social and political contexts determined the duration, emphasis and significance of early national movements in Europe. While the historical and national goals of Germans, Italians and to the great extent Hungarians were accomplished during the 1860s and 1870s, the Serbian efforts spearheaded by the United Serbian Youth, with Youth being a synonym for Liberal, came to an abrupt halt after the Berlin Congress left Serbs shattered in four states. Following the example of Germany and Italy where national unification came only after a cultural unity was achieved, Zmaj continued his mission hoping that cultural unity would eventually bring about the political one. Writing to his publisher Zmaj explained his poetry and editorial work as enlightening and educating children but also as building cultural and

⁵⁵ Szikláz, ‘The Popular Trend in the Romantic Literature of Some Central-European Nations’, 312.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Srba III*, Belgrade: BIGZ, 1989, 103-133.

⁵⁷ For Serbian liberalism see Gale Stokes, *Legitimacy Through Liberalism: Vladimir Jovanovic and the Transformation of Serbian Politics*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975, Diana Mishkova, *Prisposobiavane na svobodata: modernost v Srbija i Ruminiia prez XIX vek*, Sofia: Paradigma, 2001, and [Milan Subotić](#), *Sricanje slobode. Studije o počecima liberalne političke misli u Srbiji XIX veka*, Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 1992.

national ties over political borders that would connect spiritually Serbs in Hungary, Serbia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and keep their spirit of freedom alive so that they can respond to future developments and social progress.⁵⁸ Permanent threats and the loss of rights and importance of Serbs in Hungary and turmoil in other countries inhabited by Serbs prompted Zmaj to abandon most of experimentation of his earlier poetry. Political concerns influenced his stylistic and thematic choices, ushering in the poetry of expressed patriotism and positive self reliance. Such is the message of Zmaj's famous poem 'Grandfather and grandson,' which glorifies the instrument - *gusle*, epitomizing the folk spirit and tradition as a source of national rebirth:

GRANDFATHER AND GRANDSON

The grandfather took his grandson,
Sat him on his lap,
And sang to him to the accompaniment of the gusle
Of what had once been.

He sang to him of Serbian glory
And of Serbian heroes,
He sang to him of fierce battles,
Of many a hardship.

The grandfather's eye glowed,
So he shed a tear,
And he told his grandson
To kiss the gusle.

The child kissed the gusle
And then asked with interest,
'Tell me, grandpa; Why did I
kiss that gusle?'

'You do not understand, you little Serb,
Us old folk, we know, –
When you've grown up, when you've thought it out,
You'll see for yourself!'⁵⁹

Imbuing the folk style poetry with modern idea of national existence and qualities, independence and even superiority Zmaj's poems often produced pathetic undertones. Unlike his poetic idol Petőfi Zmaj's lyrics hardly ever overcame their romantic inspiration and acquired realistic notions. His political preferences determined what and how idealized images of the people were conveyed, the images which had hardly anything to do with real people. Only with his children's poetry Zmaj approached the reality. In it Zmaj rendered unforgettable scenes and characters from a childhood and was often praised as inventing childhood in Serbian literature.

⁵⁸ Letter to Arsa Pajević published as Letter 237, *Prepiska Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja I* [Zmaj's Correspondence I], Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1957, 310-314.

⁵⁹ This translation is from Balázs Trencsényi et al, *Inter-texts of Identity. Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1775-1945: Texts and Commentaries.*

Zmaj was not a political theorist and one might seek in vain for his elaborate understanding of national sovereignty or individual freedom. As one might expect there was nothing of liberal economic doctrines in the writings of a poet whereas his social philosophy was restricted to vague egalitarian declarations of welfare and justice for all. Yet to be a poet meant to assume a social responsibility. Through one's writing but also through one's deeds one was supposed to act and contribute to the solution of social, cultural, political and above all national problems. Zmaj took this responsibility seriously and acted against all the evils of his time and his people – poverty, misery, exploitation, injustice and treachery. Proudly situating himself in the tradition of the enlightenment Zmaj described his role as that of the messenger of Benjamin Franklin.⁶⁰ The journals he edited and their limited readership were often the only public, the only place to discuss these problems, even when subjected to a strict censorship. In them Zmaj published his own political manifestos, pledging to promote truth and justice, extol diligence, solidarity and common good while castigating and ridiculing duplicity, charlatanism, egoism, conservatism, superciliousness, malice and disunity.⁶¹ Applied in concrete historical situations his appeals ranged from calling for the support of the United Youth and against what he termed rotten black clergy of the Orthodox Church, to making appeals for the fostering of education among Serbs. One example is his appeal to Serbian high school students in Pančevo to resist insults of their German fellows and instead of fight revenge with better school results. Elsewhere, as staunch Republican Zmaj opposed Serbia's transformation into Kingdom or satirized Hungarian ethnic statistics, population censuses, elections or state bureaucracy.⁶² In all of his poetic cum political work Zmaj believed to fill the vacuum of what children could not learn in school or what political parties avoided to thematize for one or another reason and to counterbalance the official Hungarian and Serbian propaganda. Unlike so many other nineteenth century writers, one thinks immediately on Victor Hugo, who denounced in his prose or journalistic accounts the social evils, Zmaj did it in verse. But, as it is often the case, the social commitment did not mean an artistic accomplishment. Zmaj's poems, impelled by current affairs, written quickly with militant passion, and obsessed with the idea to point to a problem and advocate a solution are often simplistic, superficial, and purely didactic if not demagogic. Most sounded outdated soon after they were written. Nevertheless, Zmaj voluntarily sacrificed his vocation of the poet at the altar of politics and the nation and acted according to this image. Only that the notion of nation changed immensely during the century after his death and those in charge of the nation made sure to change it retrospectively and thus confuse Zmaj's national and state loyalty.

Zmaj's Hungarian and Serbian Homeland

Zmaj's relation to Hungarians and Hungary is usually seen through his numerous translation and adaptation of Hungarian poetry. Already in 1855, he translated first

⁶⁰ Tihomir Ostojić, 'Zmaj Jovan Jovanović i Đorđe Rajković II', *Letopis Matice Srpske*, Vol, 84/252, No. 7, 1908, 1-44, here 7.

⁶¹ The manifestos were usually published in the opening numbers of numerous satirical magazines Zmaj edited such as *Zmaj (Dragon)*, *Žiža (Flame)*, *Komarac (Mosquito)*, etc.

⁶² Vaso Milinčević, 'Jovan Jovanović kao urednik i saradnik lista za šalu i satiru "Zmaj"', *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol, 37/2, 1989, 219-227, and Miodrag Maticki, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj kao urednik i saradnik almanaha i kalendara', *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol, 38/3, 1990, 523-528.

short poems by Sándor Petőfi followed by his major work János Vitéz (John the Valiant), and in 1858, by the translation of another great Hungarian epic - Toldi from János Arany. For these and translations of many other Hungarian poets Zmaj was elected in 1867 to Hungarian Kisfaludy Literary Society (A Kisfaludy Társaság), which then sponsored the translation of his poems into Hungarian. Zmaj dedicated the Hungarian edition of his poems to the idea of Hungarian-Serbian brotherhood, expressing his hope that mutual sharing and learning about the life and the spiritual treasury of peoples would recuperate the damage planted by the sad past and present politics, which put obstacles to the common path of peaceful understanding of the two peoples.⁶³ In his poems and correspondence Zmaj referred to Hungary as his dear homeland, most remarkably in his verse:

*Majko vaša, majko naša, Your Mother, Our Mother,
Zemljo kralja Matijaša. The Land of Mathias Rex.*⁶⁴

These lines reflect the widespread pro-Hungarian sentiments of the Serbs in eighteen fifties and sixties, the formative years of Zmaj as a writer and political activist, when, after years of Austrian absolutism, Serbs hoped their interests would be better achieved with the Hungarian liberals than the conservative Crown. It was a dramatic rupture from a centuries' long reliance on Habsburgs and is best illustrated in the political program of Svetozar Miletić proclaimed in 1860, which for Zmaj never lost on actuality and importance. It was based on the belief in equality of people in Hungary, respect of their existence and difference, language and identity. Hungarian Liberals however, approved of Serbian Liberals' acceptance of the Hungarian state idea but not of their call for an institutional status for Hungarian Serbs, reducing the whole issue to matters of mother tongue education and the right to use Serbian in Serb-majority counties.⁶⁵ Relationships between two peoples and their political elites soon deteriorated and Zmaj was caught between his fervent Serbian nationalism and his loyalty to Hungarian state. In the letter to famous Hungarian writer Mór Jókai, written in 1875, when relations with Hungarians reached its lowest point, Zmaj and his closest associates, Laza Kostić and Antonije Hadžić, expressed hope that the politics will not contaminate the literature, which knows better what is 'mine, yours, his,' alluding to divisions and territorial disputes caused by the Eastern crisis.⁶⁶ After the crisis 1875-1878, Zmaj participated again in Hungarian cultural and political life, actively supporting the movements of Hungarian Youth or appealing to the aid of the city of Szeged, after the disastrous flood in 1879. The honors and translations of Zmaj's work by Hungarian writers continued despite Zmaj's staunch criticism of Hungarian politics under Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, especially the policy of Magyarization. Hungarian literati celebrated pompously the 40th anniversary of Zmaj's work in 1889. As a sign of gratitude Zmaj translated famous drama *Az ember*

⁶³ Ištvan Pot, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj i Kišfaludijevo društvo', in idem, O srpsko-mađarskim kulturnim odnosima u XIX veku, Beograd, Novi Sad: Vukova zadužbina, Matica srpska, 1993, 104-118, here 108.

⁶⁴ See I. Poth, 'Die Darstellung der politischen Wirklichkeit in der Poesie von Jovan Jovanović Zmaj', Studia Slavica Hungarica, Vol XIV, 196, 331-340, here 336-337. For other references see Ištvan Pot, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj i Kišfaludijevo društvo', 111.

⁶⁵ For the passage of Hungarian liberal nationalism to a clearly anti-Serbian exclusivist nationalism during the second half of the nineteenth century see Robin Okey, 'A Trio of Hungarian Balkanists: Béni Kállay, István Burián and Lajos Thallóczy in the Age of High Nationalism', Slavonic & East European Review, Vol, 80/2 April 2002, 234-66, here 239.

⁶⁶ Letter 137 in Prepiska Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja I, 161-162.

tragédiája (Human Tragedy) from Imre Madách. On a more personal note, after the death of his wife, Zmaj lived with his Hungarian housewife Maria Tarnóczy and most probably fathered one and raised both of her two daughters, an information later cleansed from poet's biography.⁶⁷

What complicates this attempt to locate the meaning of national belonging within later established parameters is that Zmaj never bothered with territorial issues. The closest he came in explaining his view of the position of Serbian national minority in Hungary was in 1881, when he rejected the criticism for reporting on Hungarian politics and cultural events in his magazine for children *Neven*:

We are in Hungary, political conflicts are temporary and might change tomorrow – but we will stay here so why not let our children know about their immediate environment!? Because it is not Serbian !? I believe I am a good Serb but I will not go so far away. I want my young audience to be Serbs before all, but not only Serbs and nothing more.⁶⁸

In the period of socialism after the Second World War Zmaj's activism in Hungary and translations from Hungarian were used both in Hungary and Yugoslavia as evidence of the brotherhood of two peoples. Serbian nationalist interpretation usually completely ignored them.⁶⁹ Posthumous celebrations of Zmaj also saw a twist of irony in the fact that Zmaj's most enchanted hymns to freedom were not his own but translations of Hungarian and German one.⁷⁰ The problem was that Zmaj's ideas on people, nation and state could hardly fit a firmly established notion that all political movements of nationalities in Hungary were separatist. In fact, it was not until the early twentieth century and the so-called Romanian Memoranda trial which, together with the Slovak nationalist movement, drew the attention of the international public opinion to the Hungarian nationality question. At the same time, the trend toward Serbo-Croatian unity in Croatia and Dalmatia posed the serious threat both to Hungarian government and its policies on nationalities and the crown. The paradox that the Serbian linear, teleological narrative of the liberation from foreign domination and unification in the nation-state had to reconcile with was that the Serbs in Hungary were culturally and economically most advanced of all Serbs, yet not irredentist and agitating violence in achieving their political goals.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the Liberals are presented as the bearers of national conscience and program, whereas Bačka and Banat regions of South Hungary are clearly Serbian regions, which they only did not dare to proclaim.⁷² Quite opposite to this view, Hungarian historiography treated Serbs as the least dangerous of all nationalities in Hungary. Serbian political parties were deeply divided and losing one election after the other, while many of the prominent Serbs supported Hungarian government all the way until the First

⁶⁷ See Mladen Leskovac, ed., *Zmajev bečki dnevnik [Zmaj's Vienna Diary]*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1983, 221-222.

⁶⁸ Letter to his publisher Arsa Pajević published as Letter 233 in *Prepiska Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja I*, 304-306.

⁶⁹ In the recently published key textbook on the Serbian literature, *Istorija srpske književnosti*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 2004, Jovan Deretić writes that Zmaj translated poems from the neighboring Hungary (sic).

⁷⁰ Kosta Milutinović, *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj kao politički i nacionalni pesnik [Zmaj as Political and National Poet]*, Novi Sad, 1933, 7.

⁷¹ See for example Dušan T. Bataković, 'The Balkan Piedmont: Serbia and the Yugoslav Question', *Dialogue*, Vol, 10, 1994, 25-73.

⁷² Stajić, *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj*, 76-77.

World War. Serbs were fully integrated in Hungary and performed all military, police and administrative functions. An interesting account is the testimony of Miletić's daughter, describing how her father was arrested in 1876, by Hungarian state prosecutor Vasa Popović, judge Jerković and Novi Sad police chief Maša Manojlović, all of them apparently of the Serbian ethnic background.⁷³

The Serbian historiography successfully resolved the paradox by enforcing a clear division and conflict between cultural nationalists such as Zmaj, that maintained strong attachment to purely Serbian political parties on the one hand, and those so-called magyarophile intellectuals and elites, who associated themselves with the Hungarian political elites, on the other hand. This enabled the nationalist narrative to take side and celebrate the role of the former in the national 'liberation' struggle. In this way the loyalty of Zmaj or other cultural nationalists to the Hungarian state or even Hungarian state patriotism never enters the picture. This late wisdom ignores the fact that only the cataclysm of the First World War made the dissolution of Habsburg Monarchy and the unification of South Slavs possible. Similarly, there was nothing ironic that a cultural nationalist, as Zmaj was, cherishes the richness of the poetry of peoples with whom Serbs lived together and in whose culture and literature he felt at home, even if that meant using German and Hungarian lyrics to denounce the mischief or oppression by the Austrian or Hungarian government.

Another important moment complicates the 'national' profile of the people's poet. Pugnacious critic of the Hungarian government, first germanization and later magyarization policies, political repression, and defender of national, political and cultural rights of Hungarian Serbs, Zmaj attacked with the same ferocity the government and ruling monarchs of Serbia or the conservative Serbian Church hierarchy in the Monarchy for their corruption, misuse of power, authoritarianism, etc. Zmaj insisted on the differentiation between the state and the people, which was best illustrated by the polemic he had with Sava Bjelanović, the editor of *Srpski list* (Serbian Magazine), the journal for Serbian interests in Dalmatia as its subtitle read.⁷⁴ Zmaj was scandalized by the reporting of the journal, which in mid-1880s, supported the ruling regime in Serbia despite its repression of political opponents with the motto:

We are not concerned with political parties in Serbia, but with the people. Thus we wish the best luck to any government which steers the rudder of our people's ship in Belgrade.⁷⁵

Refraining from recounting all the details of the debate which ensued, Zmaj's stand, usually expressed in verses, can be reduced to his staunch disapproval of any authoritarian or undemocratic government. On the other hand, Bjelanović insisted that Serbia was the key in his striving for self-determination and independence of Serbs in Austria-Hungary. For Zmaj did not matter a bit that Serbs in Austria-Hungary in their political struggles needed to promote a different image of Serbia as he believed national interests were no alternative for universal democratic values. This might also explain why, despite his pronounced opposition to Hungarian state and growing

⁷³ See Leskovac, ed., *Zmajev bečki dnevnik*, 230-232.

⁷⁴ See Mladen Leskovac, 'Polemika između Zmaja i Save Bjelanovića', in idem, *Srpske književne teme*, 89-98.

⁷⁵ This was the formulation of the Belgrade correspondent of the journal. Quoted in Idem.

miscontent with the position of Serbs, Zmaj never seriously considered moving to Serbia although he had many opportunities. His stay in Belgrade on a Serbian state invitation and with a prestigious position of dramatist of the National theatre did not last long. In a letter to his publisher he grumbled:

While I was in Novi Sad I longed to escape into Serbia, and now that I am here, well now all my thoughts are about coming for Easter to Novi Sad and Kamenica.⁷⁶

After two years he left to Vienna, disillusioned by intrigues around him and disappointed for not being able to get Serbian citizenship and edit a journal in Belgrade.⁷⁷

Whereas the authoritarianism of the Serbian rulers was captured in some of Zmaj's best satirical verses, Zmaj was much less critical of the Montenegrin Prince Nikola, who was for him emanation of Serbian heroism and Montenegrin centuries' long resistance against the Turks. Zmaj's bias on Montenegro was almost universal among Serbian literati since they nourished the idealist heroic image of Montenegro and its sheer small size and unimportance in the present allowed them to project their visions unto it and not consider the reality as this was the case with Serbia. Upon the visit of Montenegro Zmaj thanked Prince Nikola for "enabling him to see the repository of my most passionate Serbian dreams."⁷⁸

This was not the only inconsistency in Zmaj's poetics and politics. As a child of Romanticism, Zmaj believed in harmony and eternal and essentially good nature of the people. With such a view, conflicts that arose in the struggle for political emancipation that he witnessed and participated in were aberrations, and not an inevitable accompaniment of any politics. The ones he deemed responsible for the aberrations Zmaj easily castigated as traitors. Persistently propagating democracy Zmaj was at the same time fiercely attacking everybody who thought differently from him, or from the main stream of Serbian politics in Hungary, represented by the liberals in eighteen sixties and seventies. The biggest thorn in his eye was the fact that some of the most prominent Serbs were members of the ruling Hungarian liberal party or supported their policies. These included figures such as Đorđe Stratimirović, the Serbian leader during the 1848 Revolution who evidently changed sides, Jaša Ignjatović, the greatest novelist of the time and member of the Hungarian Parliament, Đoka Popović, editor of one of the popular journals, etc. Zmaj did not spare words and insults on their behalf, perceiving their attitude as moral downfall and not as a political choice. Zmaj, the poet, even erased the name of Stratimirović from one of his poems commemorating the Serbian heroism during the Revolution. After 1878, however, Zmaj too admitted that his satire is not so sharp any longer illustrating the new defensive phase in the Serbian politics which would last until the beginning of the XX century:

I am the same as before only that I regard with much more sorrow how times had changed. Our leaders lost much of their belligerence.

⁷⁶ Letter 177, Prepiska Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja I, 210-212

⁷⁷ Milan Kostić, 'Zmaj u Beogradu', Zbornik Matice srpske. Serija društvenih nauka 2, 1951, 92-100.

See also Zmaj's editorial published in Neven in 1880, quoted in Leskovac, Zmajev bečki dnevnik, 242.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Odlomci iz Zmajeve autobiografije, 74.

To struggle alone – now this would not be a struggle but a desperate wrestling.⁷⁹

In eighteen eighties, it became evident that the Liberal Serbian block in Hungary could not hold itself for long. Confronted with the political debacle of his lifelong political ideal emanated in the Serbian Liberal Party Zmaj agitated vocally to prevent its split but his letters, speeches, articles and verses demonstrate rather his naïveté and inability to adjust to modern politics. He belonged to a party that he believed represented the interests of the whole Serbian national movement, democracy and freedom, and could hardly conceive of plurality of narrow organized and mutually confronted political parties. Eventually he took the side of the more radical faction, the young Socialists, who later became known as the Radicals, which puzzled many of his contemporaries and later chroniclers.⁸⁰ Crucial, in our opinion, was actually their abandoning of socialist ideas and adopting radical nationalism and anticlericalism as their political badge. On a personal level the marriage of their leader Jaša Tomić with Svetozar Miletić's daughter provided personified link with Zmaj's idol, now mentally ill, for whose wellbeing Zmaj worried until the end of his life. This decision cost Zmaj the loss of many of his previous friends and party colleagues, which remained in the Liberal party after the split. Old and sick, Zmaj became the member of the leadership of the Radical party, their deputy and most respected figure, but also the one whose name and fame had been used for daily political squabbles. Whole his life he preached unity but ended up being accused from his closest friend once to be in the mud of human evil and malice.⁸¹ At the turn of the century political energy of Serbian parties was spent almost entirely on mutual accusations and futile struggle against the Church leadership. The exalted nationalism of Radicals had little to do with the incipient nationalism of the early liberalism. It excelled in myth making, attacked critical historiography and denounced intellectuals as traitors. Support to Radicals soothed Zmaj's criticism of the Government in Serbia and even made him in his old age sing praises to Serbian monarch and his wife.⁸²

Nationalism checked Zmaj's Liberalism on other issues as well. Regarding the position of women for example he expected women to be innocent, clean and caring and fulfill their traditional roles. He opposed women's right to vote but supported their public activity as long as he considered it to be good for the nation.⁸³ Declared pacifist Zmaj had different criteria concerning the Ottoman Empire. There, his fellow Serbs had all the right to rebel and throw the Turkish yoke they bore for centuries. Instrumentalizing the themes, motifs and heroes of folk tradition, Zmaj and his contemporaries added a new dimension to the eternal conflict with the Turks from the folk poetry, situating it within the struggle for independence, protection of Europe from the Heathen, or using it to justify the superiority of one's culture, etc. According to their contemporary, the poet Laza Kostić, Zmaj and other Serbian romantic poets constructed the Serbian view of Turks as *Erbfeind*, exacerbating popular

⁷⁹ Letter to his publisher Arsa Pajević on December 31, 1878, published as Letter 162, Prepiska Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja I, 190-192.

⁸⁰ For Zmaj's relationship with main protagonists of Serbian political life see Rakić, 'Zmaj i Jaša Tomić', and three older recollections - Milan Šević, Miletić i Zmaj/ Miletić i Branko, Novi Sad, 1926, Kosta Milutinović, Jovan Jovanović-Zmaj kao politički i nacionalni pesnik, and Mihailo Polit-Desančić o Branku, Zmaju i Lazi Kostiću, Sarajevo, 1936.

⁸¹ Letter of Arsa Pajević, quoted in Rakić, 'Zmaj i Jaša Tomić', 87.

⁸² See Leskovac, ed., Zmajev bečki dnevnik, 254-259.

⁸³ Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 5.

resentment.⁸⁴ Vilifying the Turks, these romantics transformed popular spite towards the Muslims into ‘a principled hatred’ and even advocated the conversion of Slavic Muslims.⁸⁵ Zmaj also published several anti-Semitic poems in his journals.⁸⁶ Whether his own or translation from German and Hungarian originals, these poems testify to the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere of the period to which Zmaj, a declared enlightener and philanthropist, also subscribed. These poems are omitted in the later editions of Zmaj’s poetry together with other poems deemed politically problematic. But before looking into how Zmaj’s personality, ideals and illusions were distorted one last aspect of Zmaj’s political persona deserves special attention because of its later almost complete obliteration.

Zmaj’s Anticlericalism

As a professed liberal, Zmaj appropriated and radiated many of the ideas unleashed by the Enlightenment and revolutions of the eighteenth century - republicanism, antimilitarism, pacifism, and most virulently - anticlericalism. Together with Svetozar Miletić, Jaša Tomić and Laza Kostić, Zmaj spearheaded the struggle against the hierarchy of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Hungary, which turned the two most important Serbian institutions of the period - Matica srpska and the Liberal Party into the bastions of anticlericalism. Priests and monks were regular targets of Zmaj’s criticism and satire, be it for voracity or greediness in matters of eating and drinking,⁸⁷ be it for sexual transgressions, be it for its hypocrisy in matters of national interest.⁸⁷ Zmaj was not alone in this effort and the whole genre of mocking the Church and priests evolved among Serbian literati, which hardly differed from other literary and political milieus in the late nineteenth century Europe, described as the golden age of anti-clericalism.⁸⁸ Political, intellectual and artistic condemnation of churches in Europe came with the secularization of social thought, which was one of the most important intellectual consequences of the Enlightenment. The separation of socio-political and religious thought did not have to mean the denial of the latter but the historical role of the churches and their opposition to Liberal reforms brought about a rampant anti-clericalism, which spread from France to all parts of the Continent.

Yet in the context of Serbian politics and culture in Hungary, as in much of the region, it is impossible to speak about the secularization of the social thought as it happened in France. True most of the changes in religious sphere in the Habsburg Monarchy, later associated as *Josephinismus*, were in the secularizing spirit of the Enlightenment.⁸⁹ But the link between the Church and the State and the State’s control over the Church in the Habsburg domain was reinforced so that the Catholic and to the similar extent the other recognized churches including the Serbian Orthodox Church, remained key institutions in governing people, both in controlling them and providing for their welfare. While Serbian secular intellectuals began

⁸⁴ Kostić, O Jovanu Jovanoviću Zmaju, 441.

⁸⁵ Odlomci Zmajeve autobiografije, 74.

⁸⁶ Milinčević, ‘Jovan Jovanović kao urednik i saradnik lista za šalu i satiru “Zmaj”’, 224.

⁸⁷ Dimitrije Vučenov, ‘Zmajeva satirična poezija’ [Zmaj’s Satirical Poetry], Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik, Vol, 31-III, 1983, 435-449, here 441.

⁸⁸ René Rémond, ‘Anticlericalism: Some Reflections by Way of Introduction’, European Studies Review, Vol, 13, 1983, 121-126, here 123.

⁸⁹ Essays in H.M. Scott, ed., Enlightened Absolutism: Reforms and Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century Europe, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990 situate *Josephinismus* in a wider European political, social, and ideological context.

clashing with the Church on many issues already in the eighteenth century, the ecclesiastical power emerged as the major problem in the eighteen sixties with the formation of the Liberals as the first political party. Serbian Liberals promulgated the view that the Serbian Church like any other church was the natural enemy of the freedom of conscience. More importantly they repudiated its dependence on the Court and the Hungarian government. Most of these lay critics were indolent concerning religion or, as Zmaj's biographer Stajić stressed, their religion was nationalism.⁹⁰ Their anticlericalism was less of a striving for a lay state than an attempt to take over the political authority and power of the Church and convert it into a national institution.⁹¹ Although influenced by radical French anticlericalists, the will to reform the Church administration among the Serbian Liberals was in line of Josephinist tradition of not destroying the Church but subduing it. In a very limited space for political maneuvers in Hungarian political arena, Serbian Liberals focused on the transformation of Church autonomy into the autonomy for the people. Zmaj too, saw the autonomy usurped by the Church hierarchy and in his poems openly accused them to be in the service of foreign rulers. He condemned the clerics for ignorance in matters of faith and neglect of education, science and arts, which kept their people in backwardness, but his tone became much sharper, when attacking the hierarchy, the bishops and patriarch, who he held the most responsible for poor state of Serbian national affairs. Upon the death of despised patriarch Maširević in 1870, Zmaj wrote:

During your life, Old man
We shed a lot of tears
No wonder that now
Not a single one remains
To mourn your death!⁹²

Patriarch's Maširević's successor, German Anđelić, imposed by the Hungarian government against the will of the Assembly of the Serbian Church Autonomy, was more often the target of Zmaj's merciless verses:

Do you care for us at all?
For the happiness of your folk?
No you care just for yourself,
Since the Satan is your God.⁹³

As it was often the case in his satire, Zmaj used Anđelić's name, which means little angel, and made a play of words comparing him to a little devil. In order to stress his scorn for Anđelić Zmaj made a parallel to his famous verses written upon the release of Svetozar Miletić from prison, when he called Serbian mothers to raise their babies from cradles and bring them out on the street so they too can see Miletić and frame forever in their memory the image of the greatest Serb of all. Writing about the

⁹⁰ Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 80.

⁹¹ For the conflicts over prerogatives of the Serbian Church autonomy see Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1992.

⁹² Milinčević, 'Jovan Jovanović kao urednik i saradnik lista za šalu i satiru "Zmaj"', 225.

⁹³ Istvan Poth, 'O političko-satiričnim pesmama Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja', idem, *Srpsko-mađarski kulturni odnosi u XIX veku*, 119-140, here 139.

Patriarch however, Zmaj warned Serbs to hide their children if he is passing by so that the children do not get contaminated and poisoned with his evil.⁹⁴

A staunch anticlericalist, Zmaj was at the same time a deeply religious person, which was almost unique among Serbian secular intellectuals of the period. In a collection of Serbian religious poems, which appeared in 1902, Zmaj's poems made more than half of all entries.⁹⁵ Most of them are simple - in some Zmaj prays for the Serbian people, in other propagates love for the neighbor or praises the Love of God like in the poem 'Hristos i deca' (Christ and children):

Blessed are ye, the little ones,
Free in spirit like doves,
Blessed are ye, my children,
It is ye that Jesus loves!

In Christianity Zmaj primarily saw humanism, the resolution of social contradictions, the humane reconstruction of the world and harmony with the nature. In his poem 'Jest' (Truth) he comes close to Tolstoyan ideas, when he rejects the famous verse "render into Caesar what belongs to Caesar" (Matt 22:21) and proposes instead "render into People what belongs to People". His Christianity is also inspired by the one preached by other Romanticists, Novalis and Chateaubriand or imbued by ideas professed by Renan. Condemning bigotry and mysticism of traditional religion, Zmaj extols values of justice, modesty and sincerity like in the poem 'Jedno'(One):

One is above all,
One is true glory:
Root out the seeds of evil,
Conquer all that is vile
Shameful and low;
Curb the passions
And all that is hoggish
Come close to God
With pure heart,
And noble spirit,
To God,
Which is eternal Justice
And thus is God.

Mediating other foreign influences Zmaj was also an ardent advocate of cremation, a pioneer of this cause among the Serbs. But no issue showed Zmaj's attitude to religion better than his relationship with the Nazarenes, the issue that brought him the most controversy during his life time, and was together with his anticlericalism erased in later remembrance.

The Nazarenes were the first new religious movement or sect to arise in Hungary after the sixteenth century. They were distinguished for their rejection of priesthood, infant baptism and transubstantiation as well as for refraining from military service

⁹⁴ Both poems published in his journal *Starmali* on 20.11. 1879.

⁹⁵ Milan Šević, ed., *Molitva u umetničkoj pesmi srpskoj* [Prayer in Serbian Artistic Poetry], Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1902.

and politics, and refusing to take an oath.⁹⁶ The bulk of the converts were found in South Hungary, where they attracted members of numerous ethnic minorities, the Orthodox Serbs being the most prone to conversion. These Serbian converts were in fact the first Protestant Serbs. Besides communitarian principles, revived traditional or invented customs and work ethic, the Nazarenes radiated strong religious appeal. Similar to that of other contemporary Protestant revivalists, the success of the Nazarene proselytism in matters religious lay in the combination of their morality, the proximity of their beliefs to older folk notions of religion, and a gripping emotionalism. They used everyday language in their services and Serbian Nazarenes spread and read the Bible in vernacular as translated by Vuk Karadžić and Đura Daničić. Furthermore, Serbian converts were attracted by the Nazarenes' anticlericalism and lay-centered religion, and especially nurtured on its criticism of the common laxity or nominal Christianity, the idleness of the clergy and especially the decay in the Orthodox Church.⁹⁷ Disassociating themselves from the Orthodox, and other established churches described in this way, everyone willing to join them was offered an opportunity to learn to read and write and to speak about and interpret their spiritual experience. Furthermore, converts to Nazarenes enjoyed all the benefits of solidarity from other members of their community and thus were able to overcome much of the malaise affecting the poor and rural population of Hungary at the time.

A great share in the enormous success of the spread of the Nazarenes was attributed to Jovan Jovanović Zmaj for his beautiful translation of their hymnal, the Zion's Harp, which appeared in 1878.⁹⁸ These were the first religious hymns in vernacular since the Serbian Orthodox Church in its services used the ninth century translation of hymns, which became incomprehensible over centuries and, as even priests confirmed, could not satisfy people's religious longings.⁹⁹ This first Serbian version of Zion's Harp was published in 800 copies only.¹⁰⁰ Ten years later another 2,000 were added while third edition reached fantastic 8,600 copies not to mention handwritten exemplars, which are still the most treasured relics among descendants of the first Nazarenes.¹⁰¹ When Nazarene hymns appeared in Zmaj's translation, he was already one of the most beloved poets, whose verses many Serbs knew by heart and accepted like folk poems, which certainly added to the Nazarene appeal. Approaching

⁹⁶ On the Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia in the nineteenth century see mine *Religious Dissent between the Modern and the National: The Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia 1850-1914*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006.

⁹⁷ The Nazarene preachers in their sermons called the churches stone coffins and described priests as lazy social parasites. See 'A nazarénusokról', *Pesti napló* May 19, 1870, 22.

⁹⁸ *Harfa Siona: zbirka pjesama na hvalu Bogu po naredbi Božijoj*. Preveli Jovan Jovanović Zmaj i Đorđe Rajković, Novi Sad: troškom sunasljednika Hristovi nazarena, 1878. Zmaj alone translated around one hundred fifty hymns while the rest was done by another poet and Zmaj's close friend Đorđe Rajković.

⁹⁹ Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Zašto se u nas nazarenstvo širi i kako bi to mogli sprečiti* [Why are Nazarenes Gaining Ground among our People and how to Prevent That] Novi Sad, 1898, 14 -15.

¹⁰⁰ Jenő Szigeti, 'A nazarínus énekeskönyv története', [History of Nazarene Hymnal] in idem, "Űs emlékezzél meg az uryl...", Budapest : Szabadegyházak Tanácsa, 1981, 54.

¹⁰¹ Jaša Tomić, *Pametno nazarenstvo* [Smart Nazarenism] Novi Sad: Srpska štamparija Dra Svetozara Miletića, 1897, 5. The success of the Serbian translation of Zion's Harp becomes even more apparent when compared with the Romanian edition of Zion's Harp, which first appeared only in 1894, in two thousand copies and rather poor translation.

Serbian villagers the Nazarene preachers were recorded reciting Zmaj's hymns from their songbook in the place of theological explanations.¹⁰²

The Serbian Church was scandalized and launched a campaign against Zmaj, blaming him for covetousness and sacrilege committed out of sheer material interest. The hierarchy of the Serbian Metropolitanate boycotted Zmaj and the seminarians wondered how to admire the popular poetry of a heretic.¹⁰³ Church accusations of Zmaj's greediness as reason for his involvement with the Nazarenes were absurd to say the least, considering his position in literary establishment. To the contrary, Zmaj's acceptance, as pointed out in a booklet by a rare supporter, is to be explained with his own religious poetry, which shares many of the same motifs as the Nazarene hymns.¹⁰⁴ Condemning church rituals and clericalist mischief while celebrating Jesus' message of love and good in his religious poems, Zmaj shared Tolstoyan and Nazarene contempt of religious intermediaries as articulated in his most famous anticlericalist poem 'Jest':

When the poor have no bread and die from hunger,
The others cook for the dead and make crosses from sugar.
When the jails are full of slaves and misery is everywhere,
They build two towered churches with golden veneer.¹⁰⁵

Yet unlike Tolstoy Zmaj never broke away from the Orthodox Church. In his statement responding to attacks many years later Zmaj regretted if his translation of the Nazarene hymns was used to the detriment of the Orthodox Church, but remained firm in his belief that they are beautiful, sincere and truly devotional, asserting that they could be beneficial for the Orthodox Church as well.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, praising the religious and literary quality of Nazarene hymns Zmaj never wrote a word in their defense from the constant maltreatment by both civil and Church authorities obviously fearing the political consequences of the mass fall away of the Serbs to the ranks of sectarians.¹⁰⁷

This was not the only occasion where nationalism tamed Zmaj's anticlericalism. In 1883, Zmaj was honored to escort Montenegrin Prince Nikola as his personal physician on a visit to Russia. Taken by the welcome on one of the rare travels he ever made and immersed in russophilia, Zmaj could not hide words of exaltation upon seeing the gilded domes of Kremlin, forgetting his liberalism, all his long years of sympathy for the Poles oppressed by the Russians, and his anticlericalism.¹⁰⁸ This little episode would have no importance were it not so illustrative of the pattern of

¹⁰² Vladimir Dimitrijević, *Kako je naš deda Živan ostavio nazarenstvo* [How did our Živan abandon Nazarenism] Belgrade, 1898, 9, and *Nazarenstvo njegova istorija i suština* [Nazarenism. Its History and Essence], Novi Sad: 1894, 167-171.

¹⁰³ Some priests closer to the Serbian Radical party ignored the official stand and one of them conducted funeral rites when Zmaj died. See Lazar Rakić, 'Zmaj i Jaša Tomić', 91.

¹⁰⁴ An account of the campaign and an apology of Zmaj's translation is Jovan Maksimović's booklet, *Zmajovo nazarenstvo*, Belgrade, 1911.

¹⁰⁵ *Pevanija*, 217.

¹⁰⁶ Maksimović, *Zmajovo nazarenstvo*, 22-24. Zmaj's statement was published in *Zastava*, on June 23, 1899.

¹⁰⁷ Stajić, *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj*, 83. State authorities persecuted Nazarenes because of their refusal to bear arms whereas the Serbian Church refused to accept Nazarene children in its schools.

¹⁰⁸ More absurdly Zmaj testified that in ten days he had not seen a single drunkard, *Odlomci Zmajeve autobiografije*, 72.

how Zmaj and Liberals easily sacrificed their views. The domination of the ‘raison d’État’ or ‘raison de la nation’ in the appropriation of liberal ideas in the attitude towards the Church politics brought unforeseen consequences. Zmaj was enthusiastic about the success of the Liberals and later their radical splinter group in attaining power and transforming the Church autonomy for their cause and to the detriment of clergy and hierarchy yet their success was bitter. The importance of Serbian autonomy in Hungary was increasingly marginalized leading to its abolition in 1912. Furthermore, the struggle over Church autonomy as the chief preoccupation of secular parties contributed to the identification of Church and nation in clerical and conservative discourses, which was finally cemented in the interwar period. In the changed circumstances the hierarchy of the Serbian Church was able to revert all gains of the Liberals. A series of reform of Serbian church administration thereafter progressively abolished the participation of lay people ending up in the situation with the Serbian Orthodox Church being the sole Orthodox Church where the hierarchy has all the power while the lower clergy and lay people have none.¹⁰⁹

Zmaj in his Time

During his life Zmaj’s collections of poems never reached high circulation numbers and the lack of subscribers was a perennial problem prompting Zmaj to stop editing one journal after the other. Yet his poetry and ideas expressed in verses reached the common folk, or at least its literate portion, through the most common reading stuff of the time - the calendars and almanacs. The Calendar with the widest circulation *Orao* (Eagle), introduced the selection of Zmaj’s poetry in 1875, with the title “Great People’s Poet,” a sort of terminus post quem for dating Zmaj’s immense popularity and also an inspiration for the title of this study.¹¹⁰ Zmaj became a synonym for the poet and his poetry became the property of the people as many of his poems were sung as any other popular songs whose origin had been forgotten. Not only his poems were reprinted en masse but some almanacs soon adopted his recognizable name in their titles in order to boost popularity. In nineteen eighties and nineties Zmaj’s poetry was extensively translated to Hungarian and German and even spread across the ocean. In 1894, the most distinguished scientists of Serbian origin Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) published in American *Century Magazine* an article on Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, an almost hagiographic account entitled “Chief Servian Poet.”¹¹¹ With the assistance of Robert Underwood Johnson, poet and editor of *Century Magazine*, Tesla translated and co-edited a collection of Zmaj’s poems, published as *Songs of Liberty and Other Poems* (New York, 1897). During the Great War, when national and most of literary activities of Serbs in Hungary ceased, Hungarian authorities supported the appearance of the comical journal *Zmaj* in an attempt to generate the sense of normalcy.¹¹²

The literary establishment and critics were more restrained. Croatian writer Jagić already in 1867, criticized Zmaj for spending his talent on humoristic and ephemeral political poetry instead of writing serious lyrics.¹¹³ In 1893, one of the first Serbian

¹⁰⁹ Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur*, 111.

¹¹⁰ Maticki, ‘Jovan Jovanović Zmaj kao urednik i saradnik almanaha i kalendara’, 526.

¹¹¹ The *Century Magazine* was a monthly popular magazine published in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is available online on http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse_journals/cent.1894.html.

¹¹² Maticki, ‘Jovan Jovanović Zmaj kao urednik i saradnik almanaha i kalendara’, 527-528.

¹¹³ Milinčević, ‘Jovan Jovanović kao urednik i saradnik lista za šalu i satiru “Zmaj”’, 221.

professional literary critics, Ljubomir Nedić, published a study on Serbian poets in which he opened the period of the denial of artistic value and poetic talent to Zmaj.¹¹⁴ For him he was more of a versificator, virtuoso in assembling rhymes and verses, than a poet or an artist. His poems were classed as imitations, his translations valued more than his own verses. Nedić rejected Zmaj's plays with words, sophism, syllogism - all deemed products of mind and not of emotions, which should be the chief inspiration for poetic imagination. Zmaj's lyric is so prosaic that Nedić termed it prose in verses. Zmaj's satirical verses on political issues that first made him so famous brought him now the sharpest criticism. The only praise got for his poems for children. After several failed attempts, Zmaj was received into the Serbia Royal Academy of Sciences only in 1896. Some distinguished academics including historians Stojan Novaković, Ilarion Ruvarac and Milutin Garašanin opposed this decision criticizing Zmaj's populism, radical republicanism and his poetry, which they perceived ephemeral. President of the Academy, Milan Milićević, in his laudatio, in presence of both Serbian King Alexander Obrenović and Montenegrin Prince Nikola Petrović, emphasized Zmaj's extraordinary contribution in writing children's poetry.¹¹⁵ This portrayal of Zmaj as mainly children's poet, established at the end of the nineteenth century remained unquestioned until our days.

The celebrations of Zmaj's anniversaries, the occasions for both literary figures and common people to pay respect and confirm his status, were marred by incidents, not just in Zagreb as we saw, but also in his native Novi Sad. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Zmaj's literary labor organized by Matica srpska in 1899, turned into the greatest scandal of the Serbian literary history. Zmaj's long time political and literary companion Laza Kostić was chosen for laudatio but instead he delivered a bitter pill for the festive audience stunned by its unusual critical tone.¹¹⁶ Kostić later wrote a whole book to clarify and justify his position and unleashed a debate which continued for more than a century with Serbian writers and literary critics all feeling responsible to take a stand.¹¹⁷ In his study, Kostić distinguished Zmaj the nightingale, the poet of the soul, and Zmaj the dragon, prosaic and in service of daily politics. Eventually the dragon consumed the nightingale, lamented Kostić, since Zmaj did not understand and did not want to understand the difference between two kinds of passions - the transient folk passion, the momentary uproar of the plebs and the eternal, primeval passion of the poet or the inspiration and aptitude for poetic passion.¹¹⁸ What kind of patriotism and cult of language is Zmaj propagating, wondered Kostić further, when he destroys this very cult by carelessness, laziness, slovenliness. Kostić warned that language is an organism that cannot be negotiated, as Zmaj thought, for the good of the people. Namely, in order to stress rhyme with his

¹¹⁴ Ljubomir Nedić, *Iz novije srpske lirike* [From New Serbian Lyrics], Belgrade, 1893.

¹¹⁵ Vukčević, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj i Srpska akademija nauka', 463- 470.

¹¹⁶ Laza Kostić was a journalist and a deputy of the Liberals for many years, but deeply disillusioned with the outcome of Serbian politics in Hungary and authoritarianism in Serbia he joined the conservatives only to abandon politics altogether dedicating himself wholly to the literature.

¹¹⁷ The full title of the book by Kostić already aforementioned is *O Jovanu Jovanoviću Zmaju, njegovu pevanju, mišljenju i pisanju, i njegovu dobu* [On Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, on his singing, thinking and writing, on his epoch]. For the synthesis of the views of conflicting parties in Serbian literary criticism taking either Zmaj or Kostić's side see Đorđije Vuković, 'Sporna knjiga' [Problematic Book], in Laza Kostić, *Knjiga o Zmaju*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1984, second ed., 473 -577, and Ivanka Udovički, 'Lazar Kostić, prvi veliki kritičar i afirmator Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja' [Lazar Kostić, First Great Critic and Advocate of Zmaj], *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol, 31-III, 1983, 401-426.

¹¹⁸ Kostić, *O Jovanu Jovanoviću Zmaju*, 95.

laconic word choice, Zmaj, according to Kostić, destroyed many a trope and poem, whereas his folklorism often buried him in the conventionalities of the form.¹¹⁹ More bitterly Kostić rebuked Zmaj's political judgments, his obsession with traitors and lack of principle. The best example is Zmaj's staunch opposition to death penalty whereas in his patriotic poems it is clear that he wished only death to the "Turkish occupiers". Finally, Kostić pointed out that because of his poor understanding and judgment of folk poetry and heroes, Zmaj's poems deformed, spoiled and ruined their spirit and meaning. Folk poetry, as Kostić showed, knows no great hatred of Turks, only some sort of spite. It described Turks as heroes and never dwelled on their faith assuming that everybody thought his or her faith was the best.¹²⁰ Zmaj however, created the image of Turk as a coward and spared no words to insult their Muslim faith, even advocating conversion of Muslims or as he believed their reconversion to Christianity, which also ran against his own motto of the Serbian nation above the religious divide.¹²¹

Zmaj's Postmortem Reception

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Zmaj was almost unanimously rejected by the first Serbian modernists, who generally turned away from what was considered national and stale literary forms, looking for international models, eternal themes and global issues as well as their own inner worlds. Modernist poets rejected folk meter and looked for classical or foreign forms. In the most authoritative anthology of Serbian poetry, which appeared in Zagreb in 1911, and a year later in Belgrade, and which was, according to its author Bogdan Popović, based on purely aesthetic criteria, Zmaj did not fare well. The only exception to this initial rejection after Zmaj's death was literary critic Jovan Skerlić, who praised Zmaj's poetic activism and described him as the most competent representative of literature Serbian people needed to satisfy their thirst in this idealist epoch. For Skerlić he was "the moral conscience of the whole great period of our people's life... the most fruitful and most universal Serbian poet," although regretting that Zmaj "squandered his poetic talent in many little coins that he spent on people's daily needs."¹²² Nevertheless, it was Skerlić who set the tone of the later reception of Zmaj in the Serbian culture and literary canon.

While Zmaj's popularity among the Serbian people was already immense it was only in the South Slav Kingdom created after the First World War that his persona and oeuvre achieved definite contours. The formation of Yugoslavia was made possible after the victory of the Allies, which included Serbia, and the defeat and dissolution of Austria-Hungary. The new state legitimized its existence and forged its *raison d'être* in the noble legacy of writers and other proponents of South Slav unification dating from the middle of the nineteenth century with Zmaj clearly singled out for his prophetic vision. Critics, school curricula, publishing houses and all other instruments of the interwar Yugoslav nation state like elsewhere in Europe were put in use to construct a national literature with the task of providing reasons for a nation to

¹¹⁹ *Idem*, 217-219.

¹²⁰ *Idem*, 402. For the sake of curiosity Zmaj was the poet which used the most Turkish loan words in Serbian literature.

¹²¹ *Idem*, 441-442.

¹²² Quoted in Stajić, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, 150.

associate politically.¹²³ The difference was that in Yugoslavia the literature was endowed with the mission to forge unity and act as substitute for religion not because of its secularized public but because of its multi-confessional nature and legacy of bitter religious hatred. On the occasions of the twenty fifth anniversary of Zmaj's death in 1929, and the hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1933, the Ministry of Education ordered all schools to hold lectures on Zmaj. Special ceremonies were held in Belgrade, Novi Sad and literary and other journals dedicated special issues to his memory. Commemorations were accompanied by the edition of Zmaj's collected works. The key role in establishing Zmaj as firm part of the canon was played by literary professionals who offered a new Yugoslav and celebratory reading of Zmaj. Ivo Andrić, the only Yugoslav Nobel Prize winner in literature rejected the discussion of the artistic value of Zmaj's poetry. Instead he praised it as instrumental for any child who from his verses discovered the magic of the rhyme, learned the basic human values, developed first emotions and thoughts and prepared generations after him for adulthood and creation.¹²⁴ Great novelist Crnjanski dismissed the characterization of Zmaj as an outdated poet insisting on the educational, national and social value of his poetry, which immortalized the glory and the pain of Serbian and Yugoslav liberation during the nineteenth century.¹²⁵ According to Crnjanski:

Our people had a poet who could sing what the whole people felt – one for all. He was political but whatever he touched he turned poetic thus he was not a political poet but poetry turned political.¹²⁶

Just as Pushkin preserved Russia which disappeared, Zmaj's poetry was for Crnjanski the testimony of the ideal Serbdom that does not exist any more. If his opus was not perfect, insisted Crnjanski, than Zmaj was perfect in the purity of his experience and the purity of his attachment and representation of the period in which he created.¹²⁷ This thesis was further articulated by distinguished critic Anica Savić Rebac who praised Zmaj's politics and his ethics as indivisible, his freedom as both national and individual, his equality as both political and social.¹²⁸ The fact that a Republican, anticlericalist and socialist in his beliefs became the most beloved poet of Serbian society of the second half of the nineteenth century, Savić Rebac pointed out, was the best compliment this society could get. Although it was wooing his audience with nationalist ideas and tone and his attachment to folklore and traditional singing, Zmaj's poetry was, according to Savić Rebac, at the same time libertarian and imbued with latent revolt.

In the reception of Zmaj in the interwar Yugoslavia it is clearly the context rather than the literary value of Zmaj's poetry that is celebrated. For a writer and critic Radivoje

¹²³ For the parallel development in interwar Britain see Penelope Minney, 'Academia's Discovery of the National Literature. British and Russian Responses in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution', Sygedy-Maszák, ed., National Heritage – National Canon, 121-142.

¹²⁴ Ivo Andrić, 'Pevanija. Knjiga detinjstva, knjiga života' [Pevanija. Book of Childhood, Book of Life], in idem, *Umetnik i njegovo delo*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1997, first published in 1954, 167-169.

¹²⁵ Miloš Crnjanski, 'Neprolazno u Zmaju' [Timeless in Zmaj], in idem, *Eseji*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966, 38-40, first published in 1929.

¹²⁶ Miloš Crnjanski, 'Zmaj', in idem, *Eseji*, 41-45, here 42, first published in 1933.

¹²⁷ Miloš Crnjanski, 'Zmaj kao pesnik života' [Zmaj as Poet of Life], in idem, *Eseji*, 46-48, first published in 1933.

¹²⁸ Anica Savić Rebac, 'Fragment o Zmaju', in idem, *Studije i ogledi I-II*. Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, 1988, 403-406, first published in 1933.

Vrhovac, Zmaj was a national hero and the most sincere voice of people's spirit, emotion and thought, the mouthpiece of their best aspirations. He dismissed the previous sharp criticism of the shortcomings of Zmaj's poetic language, interpreting it as a natural phase in the literature just being formed and oriented towards practical and non-esthetical goals on its way to higher purer forms of art.¹²⁹ Zmaj's biographer Stajić celebrated the renaissance of Zmaj's cult, attributing it to the people who knows to choose its own literature; not only the poetry which is instinctive, subconscious, fantastic, but the poetry that describe cultural, national and social life, feeds on that life and keeps it like salt that does not allow it to become insipid.¹³⁰ The people needed Zmaj's poetry like daily bread, claimed Stajić, insisting that the nation without such literature is broken and insecure. If Zmaj was a people's poet until then, in the interwar period he was instituted as their apostle, missionary and prophet. In this effort many a political and personal conflict was reconciled and a new illusionary and nationalist ahistorical picture of the past was created. The criticism of Laza Kostić is unanimously rejected as pessimistic and disillusioned. Yet what Kostić believed at the turn of the century was the common feeling of the Hungarian Serbs shared by Zmaj as well. Their political life was paralyzed and futile, the results of their cultural nationalism weak, their demographic and economic situation deteriorating. Now, following the Great War and the unification, a different picture was projected. Zmaj was celebrated as a fighter, together with Miletić one of the greatest heroes of Jugoslavija. Two of them Stajić baptized as Yugoslav Achil and Homer.¹³¹

After the World War Two, Zmaj's position in the literary canon remained basically unquestioned but new explanations were added to account for the changed political circumstances in socialist Yugoslavia. During the war, the Partisan resistance movement took up Zmaj's verses as a wake-up call once more. Their pugnacious outcry had lost no force, according to one contemporary, as freedom again became the basic human longing.¹³² The official instruction of Yugoslav partisans on how to perform Zmaj's patriotic poetry during the war offered the explanation:

The struggle of our people against Turkish rule had many similarities with our contemporary struggle against fascist invader; except for the fact that then the fighters-revengers were called hajduks and not partisans. But they were both imprisoned, tortured and murdered while their families were persecuted.¹³³

Literary critic Živan Milisavac, responsible for editing Zmaj's work and maintaining his aura in Socialist Yugoslavia, emphasized that Zmaj was the greatest Yugoslav political poet, of the magnitude rare among other peoples. His greatness emanated from the greatness of the idealist epoch that produced him and his oeuvre stood to

¹²⁹ R. Vrhovac, 'Zmaj-Jovan Jovanović', 13.

¹³⁰ Vasa Stajić, 'Jovan Jovanović Zmaj', *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol, 104/323, No. 2, 1930, 102-112, here 103.

¹³¹ Idem, 110. Kosta Milutinović compared Zmaj's role in the Serbian literature to that of Hugo in the French and Carducci in Italian in his *Jovan Jovanović Zmaj kao politički i nacionalni pesnik*.

¹³² Đorđe Radišić, 'Zmajevno književno stvaralaštvo u oslobodilačkoj borbi naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije', *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol, 31/III, 1983, 451-461, here 452.

¹³³ From the official instruction of Yugoslav partisans on how to perform Zmaj's patriotic poetry during the war, quoted in idem, 457. Original in the Archive of the workers movement in the Historical Institute of Montenegro, sign. VI-1-16.

compensate the unfulfilled ideals of his time.¹³⁴ For Milisavac too, borders between poetry and politics are erased in the times “when the whole people is on their feet, poets are candidates for deputies and politicians are inspired by poetry.”¹³⁵ In 1955, the first literary journal for children was founded under Zmaj’s name and edited by Yugoslavia foremost children writers. Two more editions of Zmaj’s collected works appeared in 1966-1968 and in 1975. Furthermore, his correspondence with almost all Serbian literary and political figures in the second half of the nineteenth century is published albeit without commentaries.

Despite his privileged position in the pantheon of national literature, except for the portion of his love (from *Đulići* and *Đulići uveoci*) and children poems, most of Zmaj’s poetry did not withstand the passage of time.¹³⁶ But since Zmaj was a firm part of the canon, every writer or poet had to take a stand and contribute to the discussion on Zmaj’s work and in this way establish his or her own status as literary professional. Criticism was moderated and balanced as diametrically opposite opinions were reconciled by recognizing the truth in both of them. Zmaj’s poetry was described as a bridge between folk epic and modern individualist artistic and poetic expressions. Attempting to overcome the polarization of previous appraisal of Zmaj and division of his poetry on lyrical and political, poet Miodrag Pavlović advocated its multiplicity rather than duplicity. Further, he pointed out irrational in Zmaj’s poetry contrary to the previous description of Zmaj as rational, everyday political poet.¹³⁷ Poet and literary critic Ljubomir Simović discovered new symbolic layers of Zmaj’s poetry and condemned the spirit of previous epochs for not seeing through Zmaj’s verses in which he found elements for all later trends in poetry, from modernism to Dadaism and surrealism, absurd humor and Kafkian apocalyptic vision of the world.¹³⁸ In Zmaj’s poems on death and madness, nothingness and apathy, Simović saw the Serbian predecessor of Baudlaire, and in his political and satirical verses Simović saw Serbian Brecht of the nineteenth century. The new analysis does not spare Zmaj of criticism but the overall conclusion is positive and criticism is there to enforce his position in the canon and underline Zmaj’s greatness.¹³⁹ The teleological view of Serbian history remained unquestioned and Zmaj’s role crucial in justifying it. In the project of saving Zmaj’s political poetry, Simović rejected its greatest share as outdated but then in a fully ahistorical manner singled out few of the poems as still actual and valuable such as those condemning traitors or those warning Serbs not to fall victims of foreign influences or assimilation because the Serbian people still faced the same problems as in Zmaj’s times. For Simović is Zmaj’s moral integrity justified despite his frequent wrong judgment, bad language or lack of taste

¹³⁴ Živan Milisavac, *Zmaj*, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1954, 232.

¹³⁵ Živan Milisavac’s introduction to *Sabrana dela Jovan Jovanović Zmaj*, Vol. 5 [Collected Works, Vol. 5. Political and Satirical poems I] Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1967, 7-53.

¹³⁶ This opinion is shared by Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovic, the editors of the English language collection *Serbian Poetry from the Beginnings to the Present*, New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988, 167.

¹³⁷ Miodrag Pavlović, ‘Poezija Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja’, in idem, *Eseji o srpskim pesnicima*, Belgrade: SKZ, 1992, first ed. 1968, 111-139.

¹³⁸ Ljubomir Simović, ‘Zmajeva poezija’ and ‘Zmajeva politička poezija’ [Zmaj’s Political Poetry] in idem, *Duplo dno. Eseji o srpskim pesnicima*, Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2001, first ed. 1985, 101-143.

¹³⁹ See Vaso Milinčević, ‘Zmajovo višeglasje’ [Zmaj’s Poliphony], in his *Tvorci i tumači. Iz srpskog romantizma* Belgrade: Prosveta, 1984, 187-206.

since he always remained in opposition as a poet of the people living in a foreign country and dedicated to general humanistic values.¹⁴⁰

At the same time Pavlović admitted that Zmaj's didactics, humility in front of the reader and a certain naiveté, which was supposed to guarantee the naturalness and authenticity of his poetic expression, became a hindrance to contemporary reader.¹⁴¹ Another editor regretted in 1981, that Zmaj's verses have more difficulties finding their emotional way to contemporary readers and remain more of a noble chronic of the past than an exciting and lively poetical act.¹⁴² In nineteen sixties and seventies, there was a new generation of poets for children who introduced a different language, style and themes reflecting the tremendous social changes which transformed the views and lifestyles of parents including the ways of raising children. A British born director Timothy John Byford revived and modernized Zmaj's poetry and its simplistic didactics producing a popular TV series *Neven*, named after Zmaj's magazine for children.

Lastly, in the recent questioning of almost all aspects of Serbian culture and modern political development few voices challenged the influence of the philological principles and folkloric purism that determined for so long the interpretation and appreciation of Zmaj's poetry.¹⁴³ Its target was Zmaj's use of the formulae of epic poetry in the wholly different social settings or more generally the process by which the oral was made literary and the way romanticists employed the spoken language. In this, as Ralph Bogert stresses, Romanticist poets including Zmaj, were interpreted to fit the Procrustian bed of the Serbian literary canon and either praised or condemned as programmatic versifiers.¹⁴⁴ According to Svetozar Petrović, as a devoted follower of the literary style established by Karadžić, Zmaj repudiated the so-called learned poetry, characterized by thoughtfulness in creation and rich philosophy of meaning, but believed to be straying away from the popular, smoothly flowing, rhythmic and melodic verse.¹⁴⁵ For the first time Zmaj was viewed critically for his contribution to the canonization of the forms of folk poetry, which reduced the national poetic past and led to complete disappearance of the older poetic tradition by generation of poets in Serbian language. As recently Miroslav Jovanović stressed, in his study on Karadžić's legacy, the reduction and simplification of Serbian culture and literature to popular oral (patriarchal) culture resulted in suppression of urban traditions and culture, prevented the formation of the continuing and encompassing cultural legacy, fostered the rhetoric of political populism and even contained grains of anti-intellectualism.¹⁴⁶ Contemplating on the connection of literature and politics, Jovanović pointed out that the legacy of Zmaj and Karadžić was integrated in the

¹⁴⁰ Simović, 'Zmajeva politička poezija', 134.

¹⁴¹ Miodrag Pavlović, 'Poezija Jovana Jovanovića Zmaja', in Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, *Pevanija*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1968, 5-23, here 13

¹⁴² Vaso Milinčević, 'Predgovor', in Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, *Pesme*, Belgrade, 1981, 12.

¹⁴³ See Svetozar Koljević, 'Zmaj i naše narodno pesništvo' [Zmaj and our Folk Poetry], *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, Vol. 31-III 1983, 359-381, Ralph Bogert, 'The Burden of Vuk's Philological Reform on the Lyrics of Branko Radičević', *Facta Universitatis*, Vol. 1/3, 1996, 157-168, and essays on Zmaj by Vaso Milinčević, in Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, *Pesme*.

¹⁴⁴ Bogert, 'The Burden of Vuk's Philological Reform on the Lyrics of Branko Radičević', 163-164.

¹⁴⁵ See Svetozar Petrović, 'Stilistika versifikacionih postupaka Zmajevih' [Stylistics of Zmaj's Versification], in *Zmajev stih*, Novi Sad: Vojvođanska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1985, 173-193.

¹⁴⁶ See Miroslav Jovanović, *Jezik i društvena istorija* [Language and Social History], Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2002.

much general system of political myths that celebrated rural and volkisch in Serbian politics, society and culture.

Interwar celebrations of Zmaj's endeavors at Serbo-Croatian unity also experienced an apparent setback with recent nationalist revisionism in Serbian historiography. Vasilije Krestić discredited Zmaj as idealist not able to see that the whole oppositional struggle of Serbs in Hungary was futile, especially the opposition to Habsburg dualist state reform, while reaffirming pro-Hungarian stance of the Serbian elites in Croatia.¹⁴⁷ Zmaj's reconciling stance towards Croats was deemed ailing by Krestić since "history has shown that every attempt at tactful yielding and restraint from energetic suppressing of morbid Frankist (Croatian nationalist) ideas was not only damaging but even detrimental."¹⁴⁸ On the other hand there are attempts to rediscover and remake Zmaj as a nationalist and Orthodox poet.¹⁴⁹ His poems are read divorced of context and ideas emphasized to interpret contemporary issues. Their didactic nature, already pointed out as an obstacle for contemporary reader, is sometimes revived in all its banality. The aim of one recent edition, is according to its author, to bring near Zmaj's patriotic poetry to Serbian reader and to develop and maintain among Serbian children Serbian patriotism and the sense of belonging to the nation and Orthodox faith.¹⁵⁰

Questioning or rejecting the canonical interpretation of Zmaj in last couple of decades did not affect the his stand among the common people. On the contrary, there is a noticeable revival of Zmaj's popularity. Only the works of Ivo Andrić appear in more editions. In 2005, Zmaj's books reappeared in their original outlook, this time accompanied with a CD featuring songs composed on Zmaj's verses.¹⁵¹ Tens of different new editions of Zmaj's poems for children appear every year and after many decades Serbian children are again raised almost exclusively on Zmaj's verses. Zmaj's ongoing popularity is evident even in the virtual realm. Hundreds of private web sites are dedicated to Zmaj and contain his poems. Such is the site of Nebojša and Mila Radovanović, who said that they were inspired by their children Stefan, Sandra and Danica and dedicated their site to the well being of all Serbian children scattered around the world.¹⁵² Amateurs type and design the lay out of poems, volunteer translations and comments. Some Zmaj's sites are linked to sites advertising holidays in Croatia or Bosnian online bookstores.

Zmaj, the Great People's Poet, could never envisage that his poetry would see so many uses, and conflicting interpretations. Anticipating his death, Zmaj ordered his manuscripts and secured that his last journal *Neven* can appear for years after he passes away. He wrote his last will and then finally a note that he signed with his brother's name and ordered to be sent by telegraph upon his death to Belgrade, Novi Sad and Montenegro. On the telegram he wrote:

¹⁴⁷ Krestić, 'Zmaj i Hrvati', 30-31.

¹⁴⁸ Krestić, 'Zmaj i Hrvati', 53.

¹⁴⁹ Tarsa Savić, *Srboslavlje u Zmajevoj poeziji* [Celebration of Serbdom in Zmaj's Poetry], Pale: Vlatar, 1996, Nedeljko Hadži Kangrga, *Šta je najvrednije Zmaj Jova ostavio srpskoj deci: izbor iz religiozne poezije Jovana Jovanovića-Zmaja* [The Most Valuable Legacy of Zmaj to Serbian Children. Selection from Zmaj's Religious Poetry], Kraljevo: Manastir Žiča, 1983 .

¹⁵⁰ Savić, *Srboslavlje u Zmajevoj poeziji*, 235.

¹⁵¹ Published by the oldest and most renowned publishing house Srpska književna zadruga.

¹⁵² See <http://www.bgdconsulting.com/zmaj/>

This text presents the unpublished result of research carried out at CAS. It has not undergone language editing and is not to be cited.

Uncle Jova died today.
Order funeral requisites of the second class.
Wreaths not needed. Funeral absolutely modest.
Under no condition a charnel house.
Wooden coffin one meter seventy centimeters long.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Odlomci Zmajeve autobiografije, 54.