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Edgar Allan Poe in Croatian and Serbian Literature

For the past one hundred years, since the appearance in Novi Sad of the translation of "The Black Cat" in 1863,¹ Edgar Allan Poe has been one of the most frequently translated Anglo-American writers in Serbo-Croatian literature. During this period he has also continually been the subject of critical attention in reviews and essays, and the source of a pervasive, although not easily defined influence.

In the period 1863—1963 more than 200 translations of his tales appeared in newspapers and periodicals along with nearly 50 translations of his poems, of which "The Raven" alone was translated 15 times.² There also exist 20 books of translations

¹ Along with the "Black Cat", the earliest translations of tales in periodicals were "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1883), "Hop-Frog" (1884), "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1884), "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1885). — The earliest prose translations in book form are *Srce izdajica* (*The Tell-Tale Heart*), Beograd, 1886 and *Zagonetna umorstva u ulici Morgue* (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*), Zagreb, 1890. Among the pre-war editions we should single out Dušan Rajičić's translations of three tales, *Tri pripovetke* Mostar, 1906, *Avanture Gordona Pima* (*The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*), Beograd, 1925, translated by the well-known Serbian writer and essayist Isidora Sekulić, and a small collection of Poe's poetry and prose *Knjiga tajanstva i mašte* (*A Book of Mystery and Imagination*), Beograd, 1922, translated by Svetislav Stefanović. The most representative post-war edition are the *Odaabrana dela* (*Selected Works*), Beograd, 1954, ed. by Zoran Mišić.

² The most often translated after "The Raven" is Poe's "Annabel Lee" (8 times) which seems to have appealed particularly to more recent translators, some of whom were distinguished contemporary poets: Ivan Goran Kovačić (1947), Tin Ujević (1950), Stanislav Vinaver (1954) and Ivan Slamnig and Antun Šoljan (1952). Other poems translated are: "To Helen", "The Haunted Palace", "The Conqueror Worm", "The Coliseum", "The Sleeper", "Eldorado", "Israfil", "A Dream Within a Dream", "Eulalie", "Dream-Land", "The City in the Sea", "Ulalume" and "Alone", some of them several times. — Nearly all those translations appeared in newspapers and periodicals. Those by Svetislav Stefanović can be found in his anthology *Iz novije engleske lirike*, Beograd, 1923, those by Slamnig

from Poe which range from slim editions of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* to a comparatively recent and representative selection of his prose and poetry. The sheer number of translations testifies to Poe's great and steady popularity. It should also be stressed that 1863 — the year of the first translation from Poe — was an early date, considering the fact that Poe's reputation in Europe was established only after the appearance of Baudelaire's famous translations and prefaces, *Les histoires extraordinaires* in 1856 and *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* in 1868. As many as three verse translations of "The Raven" were published between 1875 and 1882: the first (1875) by a seminary teacher and later village parson Aleksandar Tomić, the other two by Nika Grujić Ognjan (1878), and Milorad Šapčanin (1882), two minor Serbian poets.

Their translations of Poe's poem are rather free versions in which the basic elements of the story remain the same, while details are freely added, left out or changed. Part of this freedom was inherited from the previous generation of translators which didn't particularly try to reproduce the style or atmosphere of the original and insisted only on keeping its metre, and especially the rhyme scheme.³ Apart from a few lines in Šapčanin's version, these early translators of "The Raven" did not succeed, and probably never even tried, to recreate the preciousness and suggestiveness of Poe's poem. Although inferior to some 19th century verse translations, e. g. those of August Šenoa or Zmaj Jovan Jovanović, they bear many characteristics of the Croatian and Serbian poetry of the times, still in the tradition of romantic poets who in these parts, in the effort to produce a new national literature, opposed to the dominant German education and culture, followed very closely the language and style of the rightly famous folk literature of the country. Thus, in the hands of Tomić or Šapčanin, Poe's lines become simplified versions, equipped with the diminutives, colloquialisms, even localisms of folk ballads, as well as their directness, simplicity, and naiveté. In Šapčanin's version the black demonic bird, "emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*" becomes a kind of sly, undistinguished birdie, who in the end the poet unceremoniously sends "to the devil" instead of elegantly asking him to return to the "night's Plutonian shore". Such simplification, even distortion, may partly have been due to the inability of the translators, but it is also a sign which reflects the taste and intellectual level of the public to which the translations were

and Šoljan in *Američka lirika*, Zagreb, 1952, while Vinaver's free versions appear in *Odabrana dela*. For full list of translations from Poe in book form see *Appendix*.

³ This was also pointed out by Mira Gavrin in connection with translations from German in her thesis: *Hrvatski prijevodi i prepjevi njemačkih pjesama u doba Ilirizma* [unpublished].

addressed. The village parson and schoolteacher living on the fringes of Western Europe in a backward rural nation wrote for a public which would have found no use for the conscious, sophisticated virtuosity of Poe's style. So they had, probably unconsciously, fashioned the translations after their own taste and the taste of their public.

By the turn of the century, however, another generation had matured, a generation often loosely assembled under the name of "The Modern School" ("Moderna"). The generation before had been brought up under a predominantly German cultural influence⁴ against which they had rebelled in a passionate, embattled and finally successful attempt to re-establish a national literary language and literature. "The Moderns" took this achievement for granted and turned again towards Europe, only this time more consciously towards French and English models. The first twenty years of this century were dominated by writers serving their God, Art, quite a few of them after the fashion of the *fin de siècle* in Europe, of the French Parnassians and Baudelaire and the Symbolists. In 1909 Antun Gustav Matoš, an enthusiastic student of European, particularly French literature, very characteristically exclaims in his article on national culture:

There exists no national literature in Europe which has not been formed under the influence of another literature. The study of foreign cultures is therefore the best way to develop one's own, and the best nationalists are those who are good Europeans.⁵

It is therefore altogether appropriate that A. G. Matoš should be the greatest admirer and follower of Edgar Allan Poe in Serbo-Croatian literature. In a period when "good Europeans" were much in demand, the adopted European Poe was in turn adopted by a son of the Balkans in search of European fathers.

Antun Gustav Matoš, poet, critic, essayist, short story writer and journalist was born in 1873. He grew up in Zagreb, but spent the greatest part of his short life (he died in 1914) as a wanderer, bohemian, journalist and cello player in Belgrade, Geneva and Paris. Most of his life he was an exile from Croatia and his beloved Zagreb, because as a young man he had deserted from the Austro-Hungarian army. He was also extremely poor, but he refused to do any work except cello playing and writing, and this was hardly enough for a living. All his life he was torn between a high, pure aesthetic ideal of art and the realization

⁴ This was true of all Croats, while many Serbs also knew German. Of Poe's translators, Šapčanin, and probably Grujić-Ognjan, had translated "The Raven" from German.

⁵ A. G. Matoš, "Narodna kultura", *Sabrana djela*, Zagreb, 1955, Vol. III, p. 385. All Serbo-Croatian texts quoted in this essay translated into English by S. B.

that the world couldn't and wouldn't live by it or let him live by it. He was difficult and hypersensitive by birth, but the small provincial society — in spite of friends who helped and understood him — made him bitter and quarrelsome. So he made many enemies. He was always asking for money, complaining about his poverty. His art was a curious blend of vulgarity and refinement, of bluff and learning, of journalistic matter-of-factness and true poetic concentration. He was hardly over forty when he died.

There are obvious analogies between the life, character and fortune of A. G. Matoš and his model, Edgar Poe: a life spent in poverty and hack work, at the mercy of often grudging assistance of friends or strangers, among continuous quarrels and scandals. Although he never acknowledges it directly, Matoš must have been conscious of this similarity, and this was probably one of the reasons why Matoš was so strongly attracted to Poe, the uncompromising artist, the refined soul misunderstood by the crowd.⁶

In an early rambling feuilleton appropriately entitled "Impromptu"⁷ Matoš already shows an unlimited — and rather uncritical — veneration for Poe. He loves him because "he is the greatest solitary and unhappy spirit in the great, unhappy 19th century", a "skeptic, homo universalis, critic and journalist" — in short, a genius. Later in the same essay Matoš will say that it is ourselves we like to find in the work of other writers, and it is precisely in this essay that we begin to detect Matoš's perhaps unconscious drive to identify himself with the American poet — something that he will go on doing throughout his career:

While writing this... I remember the majestic, horrible poem the Raven for which my only decadent friend, the non-decadent Poe received a large fee — 10 dollars... how many times have I unwillingly whispered its desperate, ominous refrain Nevermore... Yes, only great unhappiness, hopeless despair can form a great decadent! Poe had to pay such a price, such an enormous price... Is it necessary to starve, to poison oneself with wine and laudanum, to be an eternal orphan, to die in the street of delirium like a mad dog in order to write *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Ligeia* and *Nevermore* — *Nevermore* — Never, never! This is like a dear memory of you, believe mi Dragica, beautiful Dragica de Sades... Dragica de Nevermore!⁸

Comparing Poe with his other great model, Baudelaire, Matoš betrays a strong feeling of spiritual kinship with his two idols:

⁶ Perhaps it was a sense of solidarity that made him choose the name Hop Frog as one of his pseudonyms!

⁷ *Novi vijek*, Split, III/1899, n. 4—12.

⁸ This is a reference to his separation from his fiancée, Dragica Tkalčić.

There exists between them an affinity of character and genius, which it is useless to explain by Taine's method. Both of them seem to have been born under the ominous sign of Saturn, and it is to those marked by such fate that astrologers have prophesied eternal sadness, solitude, and spleen, lifelong travelling along the paths of despair and sickness accompanied by fear and deep, silent passions.⁹

It would be difficult to determine how much Matoš's attitude towards Poe was influenced by that of Baudelaire who sees in Poe's life and work only the tragic greatness of a genius, the romantic doom of a martyr and saint. Knowing no English, Matoš read Poe in German translations and, mainly, in Baudelaire's French version. Still, apart from its rhapsodic intonation, "The Impromptu" reveals no traces of the images, comparisons and ideas used by Baudelaire in his "Prefaces".¹⁰

Matoš is fascinated by Poe's biography. In his *Notebooks* he took pages and pages of notes, on often the most trivial data from Poe's life. In his essays he often mentions Poe's suffering, poverty and the neglect and abuse of his contemporaries, for he considers himself to be misunderstood and underpaid as well, often using Poe's example as an illustration of his own situation or that of some other fellow artist. In the obituary for the poet Kranjčević, for instance, he remembers his poverty, but adds that "poor Israfel and poor Lelian (Verlaine) lived in even poorer circumstances".¹¹ In his essay on modernity he mentions Poe among those artists who "die of privation"¹² while writing about writers and literature he stresses the difficult life of all artists and adds: "Read the life of E. A. Poe and you will become aware of the horrible struggle between literature and advertizing, art and craft, writer and his public, between genius and the golden calf".¹³ Similar examples can be found in many other essays.¹⁴ In the Preface to his collection of essays and impres-

⁹ "Charles Baudelaire", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 169.

¹⁰ Although Matoš himself had supported the widespread belief that he had learned about Poe from the Prefaces and translations of Charles Baudelaire (e. g. in a letter to Vladimir Lunaček, in 1909, he said that he had learned most from Poe, "especially through Baudelaire") we know from his *Notebooks* — 15 in number, amounting to about 1500 pages of typewritten transcript, — that he had read German translations of Poe as early as 1898. In the same period he had also taken copious notes on Poe from *Essais de la littérature pathologique* by Arvéde Barine, notes from Baudelaire's translations of Poe and from *Edgar Poe: Sa vie et son oeuvre. Etude de psychologie pathologique* by Emile Lauvrière. Recognizable traces of Baudelaire's views on Poe appear in Matoš's work only after 1905, after he registered them in his *Notebooks*. The manuscript and typewritten transcript of the *Notebooks* are kept in the Institute of literature of the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences in Zagreb.

¹¹ "U sjeni velikog imena", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 366.

¹² "O modernosti", *Ib.*, p. 394.

¹³ "Književnost i književnici", *Ib.*, p. 397.

¹⁴ Journalism as a profession is another fact that Matoš mentions in connection with Poe as if this were another link between them.

sions *Naši ljudi i krajevi* (*Our People and Places*) he justifies his working as a journalist by mentioning that ideal artists like Poe and Leconte de Lisle had also been journalists.¹⁵

Matoš was, again like Poe, often rejected and neglected by editors and publishers because of his irascible temper and venomous pen, but also because his contemporaries were really unable to give him full justice. As an example of the frequent injustice that contemporaries do to each other, yet aware of problems faced by both sides, he quotes attacks on Poe, but also Poe's unjustified attacks on Carlyle or Longfellow.¹⁶ "Doomed poets" like Verlaine or Poe were always praised by Matoš¹⁷ who "valued above all" innovators, ideal artists like the "apocalyptic" Goya or the "frightening" Poe.¹⁸ All these attributes were a sign of approval and affinity by one who also felt himself to belong to the dedicated few misunderstood by the crowd. And, finally, when stressing Poe's influence in France, where a great artist like Baudelaire took — or thought he was taking — so much from the American poet, Matoš is advocating his own practice of intensive study of and borrowing from all great European literatures, and his thesis that "little cultures and semicultures like that of Croatia, Serbia or Bulgaria should, in the interest of their own existence, arm themselves with cultural goods from abroad."¹⁹

Characters, themes, and motifs from Poe's tales and poems also appear in Matoš's writing. Of the female characters in Baudelaire's poetry he says that they are either disreputable, or pure like Poe's Ligeia.²⁰ He also chooses the cat as Baudelaire's "symbolic animal", "a proud, black cat . . . as terrible as Poe's."²¹ Matoš has very aptly used such comparisons in his essays on Croatian and Serbian writers and artists,²² and we can

¹⁵ O. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 199 — Similarly in the autobiographical Epilogue to his Works, *Djela*, Zagreb, 1935—1940, Vol. 9 and "Pjesnici i pisci", *Djela*, Vol. 12, p. 137.

¹⁶ Quoted from Lauvrière in "O modernosti", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 390.

¹⁷ See e. g. *Djela*, vol. 12, p. 85.

¹⁸ *Ib.*, Vol. 10, p. 154.

¹⁹ "Narodna kultura", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 386.

²⁰ "Charles Baudelaire", *ib.*, Vol. III, p. 182.

²¹ *Ib.*, Vol. III, p. 185.

²² Comparing "Posmrtna počasti" ("The Obsequies"), a series of poems by Sima Pandurović, to Poe's poetry, he finds that both poets give a specific erotic colouring to the theme of love after death and illustrates his thesis with examples from Poe's poetry ("Lirika Sime Pandurovića", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, pp. 305—306). He also compares the conservatism of Stevan Sremac with Poe's contempt of democracy (*ib.*, p. 264) and the erudition of Deželić with that of Poe ("Đuro Stj. Deželić", *ib.*, p. 361). Even in his essay on the painter Klement Crnčić he finds that the sea in his paintings is "plastic in the first place. Sculptured.

also find them as elements of characterization in his short stories.²³ The refrain from "The Raven" was also well-known to Matoš. A whole section of Matoš's "Impromptu" was composed around the word *Nevermore*, and it is also appropriately used in Matoš's essay upon the death of the poet Vidrić: "And Lacko Vidrić died before I saw him again. And I will never see him now. Never. Never-more!"²⁴ In the same essay he describes the asylum in which Vidrić died as "a dark chapter from the darkest Dostoievski, green, dead eyes from a corner of Poe's alcoholic imagination, eyes silent and opaque on chaotic crossings where the seven paths of reason meet, where an enigmatic wind is blowing from a strange country beyond . . ."²⁵

Matoš's short story "Zeleni demon" ("The Green Demon"), for instance, deals with the destructive force of alcohol, with graveyards and people buried alive, but the detachment, logic and clarity of the first person narrative remind us of Poe's "Black Cat". The Cat as a symbol of evil appears in the story "Bijeda" ("Misery"). The story begins in the realistic mode, with the description of a young mother whose child is dying from hunger and cold, changing abruptly into naturalistic, fantastic, Poesque terror:

The cat jumped on the child, fiercely scratching, tearing with its claws at the blue, bloody eyes. Its hair rose stiffly while its cold, brilliant pupils pierced the child's bosom.²⁶

In Matoš's sonnet "Utjeha kose" ("The Consoling Hair") we find the lines:

Sve baš, sve je mrtvo: oči, dah i ruke,
Samo kosa tvoja još je bila živa.²⁷

which are undoubtedly indebted to "Lenore": "The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes / The life still there,

Without figures. Without man, as if Poe's recipe for landscape was known to him" ("Slikar Crnčić" *ib.*, p. 238) — which is obviously an echo of the "Domain of Arnheim" or "Landor's Castle".

²³ He says of one of his characters that he is "quiet, silent, mysterious like Poe's Man of the crowd" ("Kafanske varijacije", *Djela*, Vol. 9, p. 52) — while the heroine of "Lady Šram" reminds him of Annabel Lee (*ib.*, vol. 9, p. 99).

²⁴ The critic Vlatko Pavletić points out Matoš's use of Poe's "ominous rhyme-ending -or" in his poem "Lijepa smrt" ("Beautiful Death"), *Mogućnosti*, Split, II/1955, p. 619.

²⁵ "U žutoj kući", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 313.

²⁶ *Djela*, Vol. II, p. 59.

²⁷ "Everything, everything was dead: your eyes, your breath, your hands / Only your hair was still alive", o. c., note 5, Vol. I, p. 59.

upon her hair — the death upon her eyes”).²⁸ There is also a close correspondence between Matoš's short story "U čudnim gostima" ("A Strange Visit")²⁹ and Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum".

Still, it seems that of all Poe's texts "The Fall of the House of Usher" had the strongest impact on Matoš's imagination. The motif of the haunted old house appears in his prose pieces "Oko Lobora" ("Around Lobor") and "Kuća" ("The House"). The description of old Lobor also reminds us of the dark ghost — ridden mansions inhabited by Morella, Eleonora, Ligeia and the girl from the Oval Portrait in the tales read and admired by Matoš:

In the twilight this old house seems strange and unfriendly like that of Eleonora... like old, haunted dwellings where the walls hate man because he taught them to speak and to suffer, having sucked, breathed in, drunk so many human secrets, preoccupations, pains, thoughts and words, so many human lives, so much human joy and suffering. In those abandoned, neglected and tragic objects there lives so much that can never die, in those ancient, fallen houses tears without words, curses without tears, broken hearts, hearts without partners and aimless souls live a mysterious, strange halflife, emanating from the creaking of old armchairs and floors, from the decomposition of old, familiar matter and the gossamer, dangerous sound of enigmatic, hidden woodworms. On each of his deeds, on everything touched by his pious or profane soul or hand man leaves a part of his soul and being; if a snail's house speaks about the snail, how can old, ancient houses remain mute to the sympathetic ear and eye?...

In such an old mansion, in one of the remotest and oldest of Anglo-Saxon parks, in sumptuous halls alive with unhappiness and old age lived the lover of the girl that died, Poe's mysterious, aristocratic recluse Usher, waiting for the wind of madness, of fate, of unusual and inexplicable catastrophe to sweep him away like a hurricane...

An impenetrable, tragic darkness descends upon the last of the Ushers and his haunted house, darkness is also falling, descending upon these old, aristocratic roofs from where two eyes... keep looking and looking at me — while something resounds in the draw-well, while ominous crows are croaking from the black wooden tower, while darkness and sorrow are descending from the clouds, the black, dull, wandering clouds.³⁰

Throughout this essay reminiscences of Usher are very skilfully interwoven with the main theme: Matoš's excursion on foot to Lobor, the old aristocratic Croatian mansion owned by a Jewish speculator. Two eyes — two apertures — staring at

²⁸ Several years after the poem was composed Matoš put down in his notebook only these two lines from a German version of Lenore: "Das Leben noch im Gelben Haar, / Doch nicht in ihrem Blick / Noch immerdar im gelben Haar / Doch Tod in ihrem Blick".

²⁹ O. c., note 5, Vol. I, pp. 225—233. A man is imprisoned and tortured by his host and miraculously released in the end.

³⁰ "Oko Lobora", o. c., note 5, Vol. III, pp. 208—209.

him from the roof remind us of the "vacant, eye-like windows" of Usher's house.³¹ There are traces of Lady Madeline in "the demented, white and silken virgin dying in contemplation of the cold, green monlight",³² whose cries are "imprisoned within the thickest walls" of the house, while the frightful night in the deserted mansion is an echo of the nights in Usher's house "while darkness and sorrow are descending from the clouds, the black, dark, wandering clouds".³³

To this author's knowledge "Okolobora" is perhaps the best example of how much Matoš knew and used Poe, but also of the limits of Poe's influence. After the ghoulis "homage to Usher" Matoš makes a facetious digression about the local firemen, goes on describing Lobra and its surroundings with more than a reporter's matter of factness, to end up with his opinions on the Croatian nobility, the European aristocracy and "the morals of our time". The tone also changes constantly from the sentimental and patriotic to the pathetic or ironic, and finally to the horrible and fantastic. Poe in his tales of horror remains consistently within the conventions of his phantasmagoric world, his narrator himself remaining a part of this convention, while Matoš nearly always returns from his excursion into the fantastic to deal with the living, pressing, actual matters of his day. This inconsistency, or ambiguity of subject and tone are the reflection of a duality inherent in Matoš, who in his writings had rarely succeeded in blending art and actuality, aestheticism and fanatical patriotism into a harmonious whole. Still, Art was his greatest, most sacred ideal, and Poe and Baudelaire its high priests. In their lives and writings he had found not only kindred spirits and an artistic achievement that satisfied his craving for beauty, but also a religion to live by.³⁴

If we try to compare Poe's presence in Serbo-Croatian literature in the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of this century we will first of all notice a difference in the number and quality of the translations, and also the fact that in the first period there were no writings about the American poet, while in the second period Poe emerges as a living, important

³¹ "Okolobora" was published in 1908. In 1905 and later Matoš had in his *Notebooks* taken copious notes of Baudelaire's translations of Poe.

³² O. c., note 5, Vol. III, p. 208.

³³ *Ib.*, p. 209. Compare to Baudelaire's translation: "Les nuages pesaient lourds et bas dans le ciel".

³⁴ Matoš had read "The Poetic Principle", in Baudelaire's translation. In *Notebook V*, p. 162, he took several notes, among them Baudelaire's sentence: "Edgar Poe considérait comme l'hérésie moderne capitale — l'enseignement", and on p. 191 from "The Poetic Principle": "Le gout n'a avec l'Intellect ou la Conscience que les relations collatérales". He voiced similar opinions several times in his writing.

presence from various critical, essayistic and novelistic texts and contexts. With the exception of Matoš's writings and some very good texts by Janko Polić-Kamov, Isidora Sekulić, Rastko Petrović etc., most of the critical texts which appeared, often unsigned, in various newspapers and periodicals are badly or indifferently written, lacking any new original insight into his work, and imitative of accepted views on Poe. They are therefore not interesting for any of their own intrinsic qualities, but as a gauging instrument of Poe's popularity during that period and a sign that Serbo-Croatian culture had begun to follow European critical trends — in our case the predominantly French²⁵ infatuation with the author of *Histoires extraordinaires* who "avait franchi les hauteurs les plus ardues de l'esthétique et plongé dans les abîmes les moins explorés de l'intellect humain . . . trouvé des moyens nouveaux, des procédés inconnus pour étonner l'imagination".³⁶

Even more revealing of such trends than the case of A. G. Matoš, a strong personality who, to a certain degree, fashioned Poe after his own image, is that of Svetislav Stefanović, a minor Serbian poet and short story writer with a good knowledge of English, who had begun to publish after 1900 and had made himself a reputation mainly by indefatigably translating English and American poets — from Shakespeare to Whitman — and by commenting on them. It has been quite convincingly argued that the relative anonymity and malleability of a translator (and, we could add, of a commentator or critic of the second order!) often cause his work — by its transparency as it were — to reflect the taste of his readers more faithfully than the stronger personality of a creative artist.³⁷ The example of Stefanović is quite to the point. He published in 1923 a book of translations³⁸ which contained Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and a generous selection from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson, Rossetti, Swinburne, Wilde, Poe³⁹ and Walt

²⁵ In previous periods the vogue would have come through German sources.

³⁶ Charles Baudelaire: "Edgar Poe. Sa Vie et ses Oeuvres", *Histoires extraordinaires*, Paris, 1870, p. XVI.

³⁷ It is the thesis of the American critic and translator Reuben A. Brower (*On Translation*, Cambridge, Mass, 1959, p. 173) that the translator, trying to remain anonymous and to eliminate his own personality in the effort to translate a work of art as faithfully as possible, often discovers that — as a result of this — he has become the voice of his contemporaries giving them the kind of poetry they want.

³⁸ *Iz novije engleske lirike*, Beograd, 1923.

³⁹ As many as eight poems: "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", "The Conqueror Worm", "A Dream Within a Dream", "The Haunted Palace", "Eulalie", "Eldorado", "The Sleeper".

Whitman.⁴⁰ In the Preface Stefanović says that his selection was dictated by his "inner spiritual needs" finding that the poems were connected by "some deep intimate similarity of tone and rhythm, even deeper because unwilling and unintentional like the obvious but unintentional similarity of relatives".⁴¹ Stefanović's affinity for Swinburne, Rossetti, Poe⁴² whose inspiration was more subtle than deep, whose preoccupation with form exceeds by so much their interest for the matter of poetry, is a reflection of corresponding (although never dominant!) trends in the cultural climate of Serbia and Croatia at the beginning of this century. An analysis of his translations from Poe will also show, along with a very good command of English, a greater, more conscious attempt to reproduce Poe's preciosity, his elevated and elaborated style. If we compare his "Raven" with the translations of 1875 or 1878, we will notice that the text is much more accurate, that he kept the unusual words like *Gilead*, *Eden*, *nepenthe*, and also tried to find equivalents for Poe's formal, often stilted diction.⁴³ Stefanović often simplifies the original, which, however, does not create the impression that this is the result of his not understanding or not caring for the qualities of the original, or being afraid that his readers might not understand him. The public for whom he is writing his translations is the reading public that he addresses in his pretentious, elaborated poetry aware of foreign examples such as Rossetti and — Poe.

Stefanović's affinity for Poe can be traced on many levels. His Preface to one of his earlier translations from Poe⁴⁴ is an impassioned, personal apology for the American poet. Defending Poe's allegedly morbid imagination Stefanović avails himself of the opportunity to declare himself an enemy of "shallow realism" with its "vacuous romanticism of everyday life in the manner of M. Gorky" and a supporter of an "aesthetic logic", a romantic logic which should allow art "to follow man's spirit as far as and even beyond his highest, most daring flights". This tendency towards the consciously strange and unusual, which is also very prominent in both the theory and

⁴⁰ With the exception of Whitman most of these translations had already appeared between 1903 and 1904 in the editions of the "Mala biblioteka", Mostar.

⁴¹ O. c., note 38, pp. IX and X.

⁴² It is interesting that his only choice from Keats was "La Belle Dame sans Merci" with its haunting, eerie atmosphere!

⁴³ In his translations we can also notice that "liberation from folklore" which critics have pointed out as characteristic of the poetry of the "Moderns". Cf. Petar Lasta: *Jugoslavenska lirika moderne*, Zagreb, 1957, p. 9.

⁴⁴ His translation of "The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar" and "In the Maelstrom", *Dve pripovetke*, Mostar, 1902, pp. 3—9.

practice of A. G. Matoš, and which is clearly analogous to Poe's aesthetics, is prominent in his own poetry as well, especially in the themes and the style of his *Ballads (Balade)* and prose *Sketches (Skice)*. In the poem "Balada o izneverenom mrtvacu" ("The Ballad of the Betrayed Dead Husband"), the wife lets herself be seduced near her husband's bier, but is so obsessed by thoughts of him that the child she bears closely resembles him and she kills it in an agony of remorse. In the sketch "Među snom i javom" ("Between Sleeping and Waking") the husband kills his wife because, in his drunkenness she appears to him like a snake that threatens their child. In another sketch, "Samoživost bede" ("The Egoism of Misery") where even the motto, "human thirst for self-torture", is quoted from Poe, a woman ruins her family because she masochistically enjoys suffering. This analogy — or influence — has also been noticed by contemporary critics. Marko Car,⁴⁵ for instance, notices the connection between Poe's "To Annie" and Stefanović's sonnet "Saznanje smrti" ("Consciousness of Death").

The critical reception of Stefanović's translations at the time of their appearance is interesting because it gives us an insight into the relative popularity of the poets he had translated and the place held by Poe among them.⁴⁶

In the unusually numerous reviews we notice again and again the critical attention given to Poe and his poems. Nearly all the reviewers praise not only the quality of the translations, but Poe's achievement as well. Poe was given most of the critical attention and his "Raven" was so invariably commented upon that it emerges as the best known and most popular of all the English poems translated by Stefanović.

⁴⁵ *Letopis Matice srpske*, Budim, Novi Sad, LXXXII/1906, n. 236, pp. 80—92.

⁴⁶ Marko Car (*ib.*) considers Poe's poems the most successful translations in the Anthology. Like most critics of that time, he knows "The Raven" best of all the poems by Poe "who in these parts is much less known as poet than story-teller, although we would probably be right in considering his poems as the best part of his work". "The Raven" is also praised by the critic V. A. S: "Among Stefanović's translation that of 'The Raven' by Edgar Poe is undoubtedly the best. This romance, 'The Raven', would by itself be sufficient proof of the originality and wealth of imagination of this first American romantic poet" ("Svetislav Stefanović, Pesme originalne i prevedene 1903", *Brankovo kolo*, Sremski Karlovci, 1904, n. 4). The reaction of another critic, Jovan Hranilović, is also enthusiastic: "The poet's effort to translate as accurately and smoothly as possible is evident. I can say that I have read few translations of The Raven by E. L. (sic!) Poe which would so smoothly and faithfully reproduce the mysterious, plastic quality of... the classic written by this dreamer of genius and rival of Tennyson..." (*Letopis Matice srpske*, 1904, n. 225, p. 1017). Similarly Rikard Nikolić in *Brankovo kolo*, 1904, n. 19, pp. 605—606.

Apart from the usual informative (although information was often imprecise or downright wrong) articles and reviews⁴⁷ several prominent writers of the period paid a tribute to Poe's genius and expressed their admiration or affinity for him. Janko Polić-Kamov, for instance, wrote in an inspired essay in 1913:

My vision of Poe is that of a bird of ill omen flying across the silent lea of our secret self and disappearing somewhere in space, leaving behind the shadow of its large black wings. Or I imagine him like the memory of cats' eyes in the dark; of a frightened dog on a deserted road; a dolphin's back on the oily surface of the sea or the shadow of ghosts who pull our legs at night. And this is why Poe is mysterious — because of fear unfathomable like all beauty and mysticism that live buried in the graves of our souls, where — for the sake of their own absurdity — they were born.⁴⁸

In this essay he uses Poe to proclaim his own faith in the instinctive and inspirational and also to express his contempt for erudition and scholarship. In this he reminds us of A. G. Matoš. If we remember that he had also lived a belligerently non-conformist life of bohemian misery, we are again tempted to believe that a consciousness of shared experience was at the root of his admiration for Poe. Poe, Baudelaire and Matoš — for Polić-Kamov was one of Matoš's disciples — also come to mind while reading Polić's embattled attack on "the main heresy of modern literature" — its didacticism, and his praise of Poe for "not infecting his tales with tendentiousness and teaching which turn art into a road poster".⁴⁹ Poe also inspired Janko's brother, Nikola Polić, to write the poem "Noćni gost: čitajući Poeovog Gavrana" ("The Nocturnal Visitor: Reading Poe's Raven"). It was written during the First World War, in an Austro-Hungarian barracks. The fantastic, ghoulish, atmosphere of Polić's (mediocre) poem suggests the horror of war, while the Raven becomes a symbol of death and anxiety. Here is the last stanza:

He rules alone over the infinite night,
The Raven on the ramparts of Deathland.
His wings touch the deserted cobblestones.
He croaks a vicious, evil ballad:
In such a night, in such a night
I'll peck your eyes with all my might!⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Vladoje Dukat, an English teacher and scholar, wrote about Poe in his survey of English and American literature *Sluke iz povijesti engleske književnosti* (Zagreb, 1904), and in several articles, the best of which appeared in *Vienac*, Zagreb, XXXII/1900. Dukat reserves for Poe one of the highest places in world literature and writes very competently on most aspects of his work.

⁴⁸ J. Polić-Kamov, "E. A. Poe", *Sabrana djela*, Rijeka, 1958, Vol. IV, p. 245.

⁴⁹ *Ib.*, Vol. IV, p. 248.

⁵⁰ The poem was published in 1931 in the newspaper *Novosti* (Zagreb), n. 355.

With the First World War ends the period in which Poe was one of the models — or one of the slogans — of artists who were followers of the fin de siècle aestheticism, of l'art pour l'art, in more or less conscious opposition to the national, utilitarian, engagé attitudes of the preceding generations, and of some contemporaries.

If we try to trace Poe's popularity in Serbian and Croatian literature from 1863 until today, we will register two rises: one at the beginning of this century, and the other in the fifties. The first rise occurred at the end of the last century and reached its peak with the name of A. G. Matoš and "The Modern School". In the twenties and thirties there was a steady flow of translations, mainly of Poe's prose. In spite of the appearance of a few generous tributes by Rastko Petrović or Stanislav Vinaver, and Isidora Sekulić's excellent translation of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, this was obviously not Poe's era — and the critic Bogdan Popović (who still thought that "The Raven" was one of the greatest poems in world literature) complains that "it is now the fashion to despise *The Raven*".

Both the quantity and quality of translation and criticism of Poe grow again in the fifties, but this second rise differs basically from the first. Poe's reputation at the beginning of the century was a reflection of his European, French popularity, Poe was then discovered and adopted at the expense of other writers who were worthy of the same attention. In the fifties, however, Poe is translated along with numerous other authors; he is just one of the many writers who had to be presented to the readers in a better translation or more authoritative selection, while reviews are usually written in connection with some new edition, as preface, translator's note or review. The quality of the translations and notices in the daily press has improved considerably; but the particular significance and relevance have gone. In some texts we can still find affinities, analogies and occasional enthusiasm for Poe, we can feel that he is still an important presence in our contemporary literature. He is now, however, a presence of the second order.

APPENDIX

List of translations from Poe in book form.

Zagonetna umorstva u ulici Morgue, Lav. Hartman, Zagreb, 1890.

Srce izdajica, Stamp. napredne stranke, Beograd, 1886.

Zagonetna umorstva u ulici Morg, (2nd printing), Lav. Hartman, Zagreb, 1904.

Dve pripovetke. Translated by Svetislav Stefanović, Mala biblioteka, Mostar, 1902, tom. 38.

- Tri pripovetke*. Translated by Dušan Rajičić, Mala biblioteka, Mostar, 1906, vol. 133.
- Crna mačka i druge pripovijesti*. Translated by Branko Lazarević, Narodno delo, Beograd, 1921.
- Knjiga tajanstva i mašte*. Translated by Svetislav Stefanović, Prosveta, Beograd, 1922.
- Neobične priče*. Translated by K. K, Narodna knjižnica, Zagreb, 1923.
- Avanture Gordona Pima*. Translated by Isidora Sekulić, Savremena biblioteka, Beograd, 1925.
- Povijest Arthura Gordona Pyma*, Biblioteka Narodnih novina, Zagreb, 1932.
- Zlatni kukac. Ubojica sam ja!*. Translated by Franjo Mađarević, Biblioteka Hrvatskog lista, Osijek, 1937.
- Crni mačak i druge grozne priče*. Translated by Tin Ujević, Zora, Zagreb, 1952.
- Zlatni jelenak i druge pripovetke*. Translated by M. Jojić, Bratstvo jedinstvo, Novi Sad, 1952.
- Odabrana dela*. (Zoran Mišić ed.). Translated by I. Sekulić, St. Vinaver, A. Šoljan and others, Novo pokolenje, Beograd, 1954.
- Doživljaji Artura Gordona Pyma*. Translated by L. Držić, I. B. I., Zagreb, 1955.
- Zlatni skarabej*. Translated by Antun Temer, Mladost, Zagreb, 1956.
- Zlatni jelenak i druge priče*. Translated by Branislav Grujić, Svjetlost, Beograd, Sarajevo, etc., 1960.
- Gavran*. Translated by Ivan Slamnig and Antun Šoljan, Biblioteka časopisa *Književnik*, Zagreb, 1961.
- Fakta o slučaju g. Valdemara*. Translated by Svetislav Stefanović, "Tisuću najljepših novela", vol. 13, no date.