Forgotten Serbian Thinkers—Current Relevance: Preface to the Special Issue

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The 2009 national convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies featured a panel on Forgotten Serbian Thinkers. Scholars who are working in the United States and abroad presented their research on the contributions of individuals representing various disciplines. The articles in this special issue of the Serbian Studies expand on these topics and bring forward contributions about forgotten Serbian intellectuals who have marked their respective professions in architecture, astronomy, literature, and philosophy, but who have been “forgotten” either in Serbia or outside Serbia. Paradoxically, most of these thinkers were forgotten exactly because they were living and working in challenging times in interwar Serbia (1918–41) and did not receive the recognition they deserved. This was often due to fluctuating ideological and political issues there or because they were living and working abroad, where as émigré intellectuals they again often failed to find a receptive and open scholarly public to whom to communicate their iconoclastic ideas. However, their critical ideas and intellectual contributions are global and are of great relevance to the contemporary society.

In this issue, Nebojša Stanković of Princeton University presents a short biography of Milutin Borisavljević (1889–1969), also known as Miloutine Borissavljevititch outside Serbia and especially in France, where he spent his last years. An architect, a theoretician of architecture, and a publicist, Borisavljević wrote extensively about architecture and especially on the scientific aesthetic of architecture at the time when machine aesthetics and rejection of ornament defined the increasingly popular Modernist architecture. That by investigating architecture as temporal art with its subjective beauty which can be objectively studied via tools used in psychology, Borisavljević announced “post-modernist” concepts at the interwar time when even modernism was still a novelty in architecture, is further expanded by Igor Marjanović of Washington University in Saint Louis, who places Borisavljević’s contribu-
tions within the wider framework of developments in architecture in France, Germany, and the United States.

A geophysicist and astronomer Milutin Milanković (1879–1958) is presented by a physicist Dušan Danilović of Pitt Community College, NC. As a quiet man who first resolved the mystery of the Ice Age, Milutin Milanković was long forgotten in Serbian and world scientific communities. Recently, in the context of the latest discussions on climate changes, he has regained a deserved appreciation in the light of his indisputable contributions to the understanding of climate. Because of his major scientific contribution in the field of climatology and geology with some 10,000 citations at the international Web of Science database, today Milanković is not only the most cited Serbian scientist but is also mentioned along with the major scientists such as Newton, Darwin, and Einstein in the 2004 book The Scientists: A History of Science Told Through the Lives of Its Greatest Inventors, written by renowned historian of science John Gribbin.

Svetlana Tomić of the University of Novi Sad and an active member of the American Association for Women in Slavic Studies in this issue presents the life and work of the first Serbian female fiction writer Draga Gavrilović (1854–1917), whose work has been grossly neglected in literary circles. By using feminist and gynocriticism methodologies, Tomić re-evaluates Gavrilović’s prose within modernist gender literature studies and argues for its long-due confirmation. Nikola Marinković and Višnja Kostić of Belgrade University present lives and major contributions of the novelists and literary critics, who were especially active in the interwar period (1918–41), Stanislav Krakov (1895–1968) and Dragiša Vasić (1885–1945), respectively. Marinković and Kostić argue that even twenty years after the fall of communism in Serbia, the works by Krakov and Vasić remain generally unknown. In their contributions to this issue, however, Marinković and Kostić open the doors for better understanding of the two literati. Kostić presents life of a novelist Dragiša Vasić, originally a leftist but anticommunist, who disappeared in the last days of WWII and then focuses on the ethno-psychological themes in Vasić’s war stories. Similarly, Marinković introduces Krakov, son of a Polish immigrant, as the first novelist who combined modernist, avant-garde, and cinemographic approaches in Serbian prose and brings forward the theme of war from Krakov’s autobiography within the contemporary literary theory of the Balkan discourse.

Finally, Dušan Pajin of the University of Art in Belgrade, provides sources and commentary on a visionary, a Bosnian Serb, Dimitrije Mitinović (1887–1953), who was among the first known intellectuals to promote the ideas of European Union, albeit prematurely. Since 1913 Mitinović had rest-
lessly advocated for the creation of the “Union of European republics” (Euro-
pean federation) following his holistic vision for the sustainable anti-war so-
lution for Europe. By 1931 he even formed the international New Europe
Group which followed this agenda for the unification of Europe. Pajin rightly
notes that Mitrinović publicly presented his talk “Proposals Towards a
World System of Foreign Policies” at the meeting of the New Europe Group
[on February 17th 1950],” just a few months before “Robert Schuman pro-
posed his Franco-German agreement, now considered as the first step—
founding step—in creating the future European Union on May 9th, 1950.”
Mitrinović, who died in 1953, did not live long enough to witness the 1957
formation of the European Union, an entity viewed as a utopian solution dur-
ing Mitrinović’s life-time.