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## **Conceiving of a Croatian Literary Canon, 1900–1950**

Nenad Ivić

When we arrived, like a torrent, from the North, we reached, with lutes and without arms, even Constantinople. We were slaves and when we slaughtered everybody, we stopped before the shore, in front of the cities. We remained with the cattle in the villages. We stopped before gold and marble, before sails and oars, before distances, in front of might, in front of the World. (Miloš Crnjanski, *Split* 59)

Literary history includes more than literature proper. It comes into being and evolves in a precisely defined historical context, by which it is often shaped: it rescues, defines, narrates the literary past and helps shape, question, change, and occasionally subvert, the contemporary context. This complex interaction between history, historiographic practice, and history of literature has not been acknowledged by Croatian historiographers like Stjepan Antoljak or literary critics like Ivo Frangeš and Mirko Tomasović, who write monographs on particular authors, or festive and commemorative pieces. They refuse to read literary histories as texts (Perkins 29–30), to tackle literary history from the perspective of interacting political, cultural, and critical contexts, and principles of race, class, and gender. They are also reluctant to identify the ideological limits of their time by questioning its often fuzzy and suspect presuppositions and make use of the categories of culture instead of being used by them (Bercovitch viii). All this reticence confines the history of literature to the unreal and ideologically suspect laboratory of “science,” confirms its prestige as a crowning achievement of an impeccable academic carrier, and, obscuring its impact, permits its uncritical use in day to day politics.

Every history of Croatia or Croatian literature begins with the theme of boundary. Thus Milorad Medini writes, “Centuries passed since our forefathers, guided and pushed by the Avars, found their homeland on the agreeable shores of the blue sea” (3), and Mihovil Kobilica chimes in: “When Croats, while conquering their actual homeland, reached the vineyards and olive groves of the Adriatic” (9). This is an obligatory topos that marks the final settlement of the group and commemorates the appearance of Croats in history. Its endless repetition is far from reassuring, for it masks what was perhaps lived as a disruptive and traumatic experience by wandering groups reaching the ultimate limit of their travels. It delimits and maps the national territory, endowing it with a problematic stability; it homogenizes the group endowing it with a problematic unity; it serves as a starting point of a tale of national specificity: the grafting of a particular Slavic reed unto an olive tree under a blazing Mediterranean sun.

There are some who, more out of habit than anything else, want to deny the value that the literature from Dalmatia and Dubrovnik really possesses. It is true that reading our old literary monuments can hardly satisfy the man who seeks in them the pleasure offered by contemporary writers of novels; but, Dante or Petrarca do not offer this pleasure, either. And yet, they remain what they are: literary champions of the Italian people. (Medini v)

This is how in 1902 Medini begins his history of Croatian literature in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik. He defines the Croatian literary past as a series of monuments, scattered in a conflictual field where values are open to questioning, bordered by literary fields with monuments that are, as Dante and Petrarch show, so firmly established that they inspire continuous reverence. It is with a perception of danger and threat that Croatian literary history comes into being for Medini: the unnamed critic's questioning is prompted by the aesthetic value exemplified by modern novels. Medini sets what he considers modern aesthetic judgments against old literature. The problem, as he sees it, resides in the unsuitability of applying modern criteria to ancient literary productions; it is to be resolved by following the well-trodden path of "great" national literatures. The Croatian literary past should be read not against but along the Italian-European one: Croatian literary monuments are to be explained to the public so that it can revere them as the Italian one presumably reveres its own.

But the monumental status of old Croatian literature has not yet been established: "The study of the development of our literature, and the ideas preserved by it, has not yet begun, because the first task is to collect, present, and order what we have," Medini concludes (v). His perspective harbors a deeply rooted contradiction: he considers the Croatian literary past (embracing not only literary monuments but also ideas) as stable, possessing intrinsic value; yet, since its development has yet to be studied, the stability will be produced by the historian who collects, presents, and orders the scattered raw material. The literary past is seen as both cooked and raw, valuable and valueless, stable and prone to destabilization: it is the task of the literary historian to eliminate instability and produce an univocal virile narrative (the Italian model, as seen by Medini, is exclusively male) that purports to establish the canon of Early Croatian literature. Characteristically, Medini claims to write a synthesis of scattered scholarly works aimed at the general public. The confirmed and established canon will have to educate the sensibility of the general public.

Canonization entails more than inclusion and exclusion of particular works (LaCapra, *Representing* 20). In the case of Croatian literary history, it entails privileging some periods (Renaissance over Middle Ages), some languages or dialects as more adequate vehicles for literary expression (Dalmatian, Ragusean, or Latin over Slavic), some forms of worship (Glagolitic, i.e., conducted in local, Slavic language, over Latin), some forms of literary expression (poetry over prose), some forms of polity (the so-called free national states over foreign domination), some authorial instances (persons over groups), and some forms of culture (high over low). Medini chooses to write about Dalmatia and Dubrovnik, not merely because Dalmatian literature is rich. His choice is political: the literary tradition from Dubrovnik has to be declared as the most attractive, because it is, from a modern point of view, the most articulate voice of the literary past. Medini wants to construct a national literary history by maximizing the literary tradition from Dubrovnik, which represents high culture, and minimizing other, especially Slavic, components for belonging to low culture.

The opening of Medini's history can be taken as a mantra of Croatian literary history, a statement on the politics of storytelling that reveals a paradigm of scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century. The paradigm heavily depends on the construction of the Croatian past by turn-of-the-twentieth-century historians. What they constructed was a history of an endangered homogeneous nation, which lost and never quite recovered its statehood through the vicissitudes of history, and was, therefore, prey to Hungarian, Habsburg, Turkish, Venetian, and — last but not

least — Serbian foes. They transformed the trauma of a stateless national history into a heroic act of perseverance. Vjekoslav Klaić, the most authoritative Croat historian at the turn of the century, sums it up neatly:

When you study their [Croatian] history, you are constantly amazed by their endurance, their unbreakable resistance. From the moment the Croat set foot on the shores of the blue sea, for twelve centuries and more, he has defied every danger; with inexhaustible perseverance he protected and maintained his name, his individuality and his territory. (v)

This construct of heroism informs literary history, even if literary scholars seldom refer to the works of historians: if history is perceived as a lost and never recovered national freedom (of the nation-state), and if it is narrated to convey suffering, resistance, and perseverance under foreign domination, Medini's "monuments of the literary past" tend to be interpreted as expressions of national resistance and perseverance. In a history perceived as a testimony of loss, culture (especially written, high culture) emerges as a trace of a past plenitude and a symptom of future hope.

Croatian literary history recasts the problems of political history in literary terms. What historical treatises describe as a series of foreign foes and conquerors (Hungarians, Austrians, Venetians, Turks), becomes a series of threats endangering the literary monuments as privileged expressions of Croatian individuality and resilience. The unproblematic ideal of (bourgeois) culture, a homogeneous totality in which all citizens share the same ideas, norms, and values, becomes a peg unto which to hang a vindicating and de-traumatizing narrative. Literary history transforms the political trauma into a heroic cultural act; canonization mitigates and soothes the wounds, creating the impression that nothing really disruptive has occurred (LaCapra, *Representing* 23). Croatian literary history is to do what political history can hardly achieve if it is to remain a story of suffering: the history of canonized literature minimizes political disruptions and geographical divisions, establishes a smooth master narrative capable of serving as a surrogate history, and provides a founding myth for a homogenized national individuality.

The riches of the sub-Roman world, situated across the Adriatic Sea, coveted by a wandering group, emerge in the twentieth century as a cultural model for a budding nation. The ultimate goal of the literary historian is to cross the mythical boundary and appropriate the coveted other, to turn the literary past of his own nation into an authoritative master-narrative (Megill 152) that is competitive with similar other ones. The historian repeats the founding act of history on the cultural level: he acts as mediator who finally accomplishes the age-old task to settle, stabilize, and civilize a nomad culture. To educate the literary sensibility of a public is to shape its political sense.

We consider from Medini's perspective three major works of Croatian literary historians, those of Branko Vodnik (1913), Slavko Ježić (1944) and Mihovil Kombol (1945). Just as Medini included only what he regarded as the formative period, the sixteenth century, so, too, Vodnik, Ježić, and Kombol wrote incomplete histories: the chronological boundaries and the included materials are governed not only by the professional interests of the authors and publishers but also by the story they want to narrate and the closure they aim at. Although they all claim to synthesize previous critical and historiographic records, their accounts remain uncritically dependent on them, repeating with variations the issues in the object of their studies and identifying the past with their own national "self" and "culture." All three histories have been written under traumatic

circumstances: the eve of World War I and the end of World War II. Giving an account of the literary past, these historians tried to come to terms with contemporary situations they perceived as disruptive: Vodnik with the ultimate crisis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ježić and Kombol (in a radically different manner) with the vicissitudes of the World War II and the emergence of the Nazi puppet state in Croatia. Careless writing, improper use of sources, absence of methodology, ugly political overtones make the reading — except perhaps in Kombol's case — tedious but gratifying to the cultural historian, who seeks to uncover what the literary historians put in the head and the mouth of their portrayed writers.

### **Branko Vodnik's Organicism: A Provincial Savant Retells a Familiar Tale to a Provincial Public**

Vodnik's tale of Croatian literature starts with humanism and ends with the last years of the eighteenth century; it wants to "show, in a truthful picture, the organic development of our old literature" (4). Although Vodnik does not state his methodological premises, the tenor of his work and scattered remarks show that he refrains from a history of literary works. Discussing Ivan Gundulić's epic, *Osman*, he remarks that problems of composition are not relevant for literary history (237). Instead, he conceives literary history as chronologically and geographically ordered literary biographies, interspersed with short judgments on the works. He chooses his authors because they wrote; he sees literature as a stable and original production of known individuals. For Vodnik, what is not original work of a known individual does not quite belong to literary history.

This is evident from the short introductory chapter on Glagolitic literature, written by philologist Vatroslav Jagić. Commissioned by Vodnik and placed at the beginning of his narrative, Jagić's essay characterizes the writing of fifteenth century Glagolitic priests as "scarce and weak food for the soul [...] when compared to the flourishing of Humanism in Italy and, to the certain extent, in Dalmatian cities" (Vodnik 32). Glagolitic texts are relegated to the introduction because, unlike Dalmatian humanism, they were unoriginal, mere traces of Slavic literacy. Jagić ends with a remark on "the innocent Slavic mass":

The world powers see in the innocent Slavic mass the reinforcement of Slavic national consciousness, which all the non-Slavic elements of the polity where Croats live fear greatly and try to suppress. Future will tell whether the Croats will be able to overcome and remove all those obstacles. (Vodnik 60)

The ambiguity as to whether the past or the present is meant is probably intentional. At a time of crisis in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jagić seems to point to the necessity of forming a Croat nation-state, which alone can guarantee the development of a national consciousness. Hence his concern with the humanist Dalmatian cities. As Vodnik says later, the free Dalmatian city-states, especially Dubrovnik, were able to produce high quality literature through awareness of their "own spiritual force" (68). Jagić writes a prelude to Vodnik's history, for his philological treatment of Glagolitic texts shows that Croatian literature can flourish only under political and national freedom.

Vodnik adopts Jagić's main tenets and transforms them into a narrative on the politics of influence. In his aperçu on medieval theater, he places Italian influences over Czech or German ones: true Croatian literature is written between Italy and the free Dalmatian cities, chiefly Dubrovnik and Hvar. Vodnik values this literature in relation to its contemporary Italian literature, at the expense of the other Slavic literatures:

Croatian letters are the richest in the first century of their development. This literature produced some works that can compete successfully with the most beautiful contemporary Italian productions; it created the literary language which shows great artistic culture. It is characterized by some serious and original ideas. Amongst the Slavic literatures, ours was at this time unquestionably the first. But it covered only a limited territory: Dubrovnik and Dalmatia. (191)

Vodnik does not describe and compare the other Slavic literatures. His choice of Italian literature as a paragon has literary justifications but it is not innocent politically: at the beginning of the twentieth century, Italy was politically not as threatening as Hungary and Austria. Playing down Hungarian and German influences meant privileging centrifugal tendencies away from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Vodnik's disposition follows the conclusions of the historians, and reinforces with philological authority the exclusion of heterogeneous elements. The first victim of Vodnik's organicist vision is Glagolitic literature. He excludes it as a heterogeneous Slavic component, but includes it as a trace of literacy: proper Croatian literary history begins with the flourishing of humanism and Renaissance in the free Dalmatian city-states.

Vodnik did not question the correlation between national freedom, economic prosperity, and the flourishing of literature. Neither did he ask whether his Renaissance writers and poets considered themselves as participants in the project of national literature. He assumed that the Croatian national territory always covered roughly the same territory as in his own time. He suppressed or narratively homogenized potential disruptions, signs of heterogeneity, or symptoms of alternative solidarity — such as differences between cities and their environments, between Dalmatia, Croatia proper, and Slavonia, between Dubrovnik and other Dalmatian cities, between languages and dialects, or types of literacy and literature. But around his pool of Mediterranean light, some residual intermittent flickering indicates his silent political assumptions. The hero of Vodnik's historical narrative is an unchanging subject without internal fissures or contradictions: a Croatian nation, reduced to its primeval form of a city-state. This concept is the product of a nineteenth-century historiography that glorified the freedom of Dubrovnik and bewailed the domination of foreigners in other parts.

Vodnik coupled this romantic view with artful, not artless, Realism (189). His highest praise for Marko Marulić, Petar Hektorović, Marin Držić, and other key Renaissance and humanist Croatian writers was that their work is characterized by Realism (108, 134, 167). He believed that Gundulić's *Osman*, a mannerist epic, contained some of the most beautiful pages of literature and remained unfinished because Gundulić's plan clashed with contemporary reality (243). Vodnik thus agreed with Medini that compared to the vigorous, simple Realism of the great Renaissance and Baroque writers modern novelists engaged in sickly pursuits.

Vodnik's "organicity" froze development into a single heroic feat. What he described was not development but epiphany, a sudden surge of literary light due to peculiar historical circumstances, identified with national freedom and, surprisingly, with capitalism's "practical view of life" (80) that privileged Croatian as a language of everyday communication over Latin. His narrative alternates chapters on literature from Dubrovnik and Dalmatia with chapters on literacy and religiously inspired scribbling in other parts of the presumed national territory. Ominously he even included a short aperçu on Bosnian literature. This way, Vodnik included a primitive counterpoint to enhance the glory of literature from Dalmatia and Dubrovnik, which, however, he believed to have suddenly declined, when freedom and Mediterranean trade had vanished. His concluding chapter on Slavonic literature offers a bleak picture and reveals his didacticism and religious inspiration. His sense of closure, which mentions the Latin historical works of the eighteenth-century Slavonic polyhistor Antun Kanižlić, can be read as bridging the original boundary: the Latin inscriptions that Kanižlić diligently collected allude to a founding of national history and commemorate the cultural appropriation of the national territory. Vodnik's mediating narrative duplicates the accomplishments of his beloved realist Croatian literati: the proposed canon endows the national literature with monumentality by grafting Croatian intellectual resources unto a Latin/Italian heritage.

### **A Nazi Rector's Quest for an Adequate Expression of the National Soul**

National independence, somewhat played down in Vodnik's history, becomes the principal theme of Ježić's voluminous history of Croatian literature from 1100 to 1941. The first chapter suggests the pre-history of his story:

The medieval Croatian state, which was emerging from the second half of the seventh century, achieved at the end of the ninth century its complete independence (880) and became in the first quarter of tenth century (925) a powerful and independent kingdom, ruled by a national dynasty till the end of the eleventh century. (7)

This obsessive repetition of "independence" clashes with an admission on the same page that the first national king and his successors acknowledged the supreme authority of the Byzantine emperor. Furthermore, the term "independent Croatian state" indicates that Ježić, in contrast to Vodnik, selected his opening and terminal dates on blatantly political grounds: the battle at Gvozd (1097) and the proclamation of the *Nezavisna država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia) on April 10, 1941. After briefly depicting the glory of the former golden age of national independence, Ježić proceeds to the traumatic death of the "last Croatian king," the loss of national independence, and the breakup of the national territory by foreign conquerors. He concludes with the proclamation of the Nazi puppet state which, presumably, will restore the golden age. Ježić constructs his narrative as a final return to an original national bliss, characterized by general well being, love of a good ruler by his subjects, and good relations with the Catholic Church. His characterizations of the reign of Dmitar Zvonimir (13) find their repetition in the Nazi puppet state,

in the chief literary and important political figure of Mile Budak, a lawyer, right-wing politician, organizer of the Ustasha movement, and finally, foreign minister in 1943.

The tenor of Ježić's history is adulation. Budak's novel *Ognjište* (Domestic Fire) "achieved a goal of recent world literature, namely to depict racial and psychic characteristics of his own people and his own unity with it. [...] In this work the writer has achieved the highest goal of Realism, the totally objective rendering of the subject, without even a shade of interference from the writer's personality" (406). In Ježić's view, "Budak becomes a Croatian classic and, through many translations in foreign tongues, the interpreter of the Croatian soul to the foreign world, which, unfortunately, is deprived of the possibility of enjoying his rich popular language" (406–407).

This praise accurately indicates Ježić's aspirations and criteria: as Vodnik and Medini before him, he wanted to establish a classical canon of Croatian literature. Like Vodnik, he considered Realism not as a period term but as the highest literary style. But contrary to Vodnik, who saw Croatian literature in a European context, Ježić's context is the Aryan race. Though he constantly evinces rural parochialism in his choice of themes (Budak's novel is set in the rural part of Croatia), he is certain that "Croatian popular literature has many common traits with the popular literature of other, especially Aryan (Indo-European) people, which they brought with them from their distant fatherland" (56).

Ježić is not interested in specific writers and authors, even though he provides a wealth of mostly irrelevant information on them. Sure of their intentions, and of what their works mean, he merges their specificity and originality into a national soul. The literary canon is for him a totality of correct interpretations of the national Aryan soul throughout history. Huge, often inaccurate, historical tableaux commemorate the sufferings and heroism of Croats under foreign domination. Thus Ježić links the English-inspired anti-Nazi putsch in Belgrade (1941) with Yugoslavia's involvement in World War II, and he sees the Ustasha proclamation in Zagreb as its direct consequence (398). Such historical accounts alternate in Ježić's story with chronologically grouped biographies of writers. The historical tableaux are not just a backdrop for literary analysis, they often constitute the chief explanations for literary events. Except for Marko Marulić, Mile Budak and other great figures, the biographies are very short and often irrelevant, as in the case of the minor nineteenth-century writer Rikard Jorgovanić, who, we are told, had his leg amputated before dying (278). Plotting, normal in literary histories, serves also as a political strategy: Ježić's narrative minimizes potentially disruptive originality and authorship, and subsumes them under the national soul that history expresses. He uncovers the national soul as an Aryan substratum of originality beneath European cultural sediments. The European, especially Italian, influences that Vodnik saw as catalysts in the flowering of national literature are transformed here into impediments to the national soul's free expression. Ježić's cultural history translates the political into the literary:

Especially in the middle of the sixteenth century, our literati maintained cordial relations among themselves, exchanged thoughts, sent their works and even, as we saw, visited one another. Croatian literature is not just united by the same inspiration, same models, and the inexhaustible platform of popular literature; its unity is enhanced by cordial relations and personal friendships among the authors. (91)

Only concord can prevail over enemies: with this barely disguised political message, which replaces the plague of discord among the historical Croatian grandees, Ježić rescues Croatian Renaissance from the clutches of foreign foes.

Contrary to the unanimous verdict of the historians that Turkish domination was detrimental, Ježić emphasizes the good relations between the Turkish Moslem Croats and Croat Catholics, just as the Ustasha government tried to win over the Bosnian Moslems. Contrary to Vodnik, who saw Italians as politically unproblematic, Ježić sees the Italians as both foes and allies, beneficial and damaging, just as the Ustasha accepted Italian and German domination while constantly proclaiming its independence. Claiming to deal with literary problems, Ježić's history is really about contemporary politics. It is an apologetic political tract, designed to ingratiate the professor with the Ustasha by depicting national history as a series of precedents for their rule. When Ježić sees the Croatian medieval state as factually independent, in spite of its dependence, he implicitly raises the status of the Ustasha state. The bloody Ustasha rule becomes this way the fulfillment of age-old national aspirations and efforts. But this optimistic closure can be read differently, for it unwittingly discloses an ironic turn. Texts can subvert intentions imposed on them, histories can contest their reduction: the disappearance of the Ustasha is foreshadowed in the destiny of the medieval Croatian kingdom. Ježić's history can be read as expressing the fears of an Ustasha intellectual facing his imminent catastrophe after the fall of fascist Italy.

### ***Turris eburnea* or Poetry Saves the Nation**

Mihovil Kombol wrote his pre-Enlightenment history of Croatian literature before World War II; he completed and improved it during the war, and published it in 1945. He focuses his relatively well written history more narrowly than Ježić: he pays greater attention to the specifics of literature; his historical aperçus are shorter and more functional; his descriptions of literary texts are more developed and his judgments more balanced. Kombol actually achieves what Vodnik wanted but did not accomplish: to depict the organic development of Croatian literature. While adopting Vodnik's chronological boundaries, Kombol is critical of his predecessors: "they include a wealth of cultural and historical material, and, what's even worse, they constantly confuse cultural and historical criteria with the criteria of literary history, because of fuzzy and imprecise views on literature and poetry" (5). Although he claims to write for a general public unaccustomed to scholarly discussions, he seems to have higher ambitions.

What exactly are the literary, historical, and cultural criteria for Kombol, and what distinguishes one from the other? As with his predecessors, the answers are given by his praxis, because he, too, refrained from methodological reflections and believed that his writing sufficed as an answer. His introduction notwithstanding, he rewrites his predecessors instead of problematizing them. By pointing out that previous literary histories (he probably had above all Vodnik in mind) constantly confused cultural, historical, and literary criteria, Kombol indicated the main assumption of his story: literature is not history. Instead of expressing the history of a national soul, as Ježić thought, it expressed an a-historical individuality: Kombol recasts the problem of writing literary history in vaguely Crocean aesthetic terms. His main question is how individual writers succeeded in expressing the a-historical individuality in particular historical circumstances and by particular

means. Reversing Ježić's perspective, he establishes artistic value by a-historical criteria; he works from presumed aesthetic values toward the circumstances permitting their production.

Kombol finishes his book with the announcement that in the works of the romantic poets Stanko Vraz, Petar Preradović, and Ivan Mažuranić “poetry will finally [once more] begin to speak in Croatian” (418). This reconfirms that he places poetry, as the expression of pure lyrical inspiration, at the top of his genre hierarchy. Kombol unifies his history by transforming poetry into the most original, artistic, and direct expression of the national psyche, even if it does not always operate on the cultural level of its community:

Poetry will not always follow this gradual refinement of general literary culture [he is speaking about conditions in Renaissance Dalmatian cities]; the connoisseur of literature, or better the amateur of literature, will be more frequent than the real poet; and in the majority of works, literary tradition, foreign craftsmanship, and imitation will take the place of genuine inspiration. (81)

Concluding his analysis of hagiographic legends, Kombol finds that certain poetic feelings that are poetic, even if obscured by practical intentions, “can be found in descriptions of dramatic moments of human life” (35). Medieval religious poetry, he maintains, was born “not out of direct lyrical experience but out of the practical intention to influence souls in questions pertaining to religion” (48). Like Vodnik, Kombol sees Croatian sixteenth-century literature as a “small, but in some respects really rich, Renaissance literature, especially when compared with other literatures of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” (61). The richness lies in the “emphasis on formal discipline in the classical spirit of contemporary aesthetics,” which rescues Croatian Renaissance from “the popular shapelessness of the Middle Ages.” These qualifications describe the organic development of Croatian literature as a maturation that starts with practical intentions and ends with genuine inspiration and lyrical experience. The maturation of Croatian literature seems to liberate poetry and authenticity from the clutches of everyday life.

But Kombol's Crocean emphasis on aesthetics and formal discipline is only apparent. Instead of shaping the context, aesthetic judgments serve to confirm it. The Croat fatherland, writes Kombol, “was divided between mighty neighbors, and, therefore, too feeble to permit, in the tragic historical maelstrom, the creation of a stable center capable of employing all national forces. [Consequently, the Croats] sought their fortunes in neighboring lands, offering them their heads and their hands” (63). The tormented history of the Croat nation makes a triumphant come-back, this time legitimized by a-historical assumptions about art. Like other literary histories that follow the model of De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870–71), Kombol's literary history depends on his notion of Croatian national history — no matter how “uncompromising” he considers his aesthetic judgments to be.

Kombol wants to avoid Vodnik's constant confusion of critical, literary, cultural, and historical criteria. He relies on the usual practice of his day: through a reversal characteristic of the literary historian, he uses history to understand *le fait littéraire* (Brioschi 120). Kombol partakes in a discursive community that takes its models from historical works, either by mimicking them, as Ježić did in his long historical chapters, or by tacitly accepting their assumptions. The accounts of writers and the judgments on their works, the grouping of the material in periods, and the classification of genres jell into a development only if narrated against the backdrop of a reliable national

history. Though Kombol emphasizes literary criteria, his seemingly a-historical value judgments duplicate a Croatian political history that constantly affirms the freedom of Dubrovnik (Šišić 383), and loudly claims that “Dalmatians had opportunity to see that they are united with Croatia by interests stronger than those related to ecclesiastical organization, namely trade and politics; they had opportunity to see that their autonomy and position is better safeguarded in union with Croatia than under the domination of power-thirsty Venice” (Šišić 137–38).

In this political history the freedom of city-states combines with centripetal national interests. In Kombol’s view, Renaissance literature owed its glamour not simply to the concentration of interesting literary personalities but also to the freedom of the city-state, which offered a stable environment. Similarly, Marulić, who came from Split, did not write dark poetry only because his religious inspiration was detrimental to his poetic fantasy; this was also due to the Venetian domination over his home town. Šiško Menčetić, who came from free Dubrovnik, was “with all his conventionality, more readable in his shorter poems, inspired by the tradition of strambotti and reminiscent of the simple expressions of enthusiasm and of joys and sorrows of popular poetry (Kombol 98). He seems to be saved by this popular poetry. Kombol values Menčetić’s poetry because of his free hometown, even though he was inspired by the strambotti that came from Italy and domineering Venice. Art and craft, derivation and originality, are correlated in Kombol’s history to a political history that sees the Croatian national past as a series of foreign dominations and struggles against them. Under the cover of an aesthetic ideal, Kombol follows a determined historical discourse on the opposition between foreign domination and national freedom. Following a literary and historical tradition that claims an organic unity for Croatian literature and history, he sees literary development as an epiphenomenon on the development of the nation-state and its spirit. With Kombol, history of literature returns to the task proposed by Medini, though he no longer regards Realism as a crowning achievement of literary expression. Old literature should inspire lofty feelings in the Croatian people; true poetic inspiration spans centuries and obliterates disruptions. Ironically, the endangered monuments of the national past finally find their true foundation once again with help from much maligned Italy.

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## **Serbia: the Widening Rift between Criticism and Literary Histories**

Svetlana Slapšak, Guido Snel, and John Neubauer

Serbian literary history has been deeply involved in ideological debates on language and on the aesthetic value of ideological narratives from its very beginnings in the nineteenth century. The institutional and ideological status of literary histories was confirmed by the extreme pressure that communist and nationalist ideologies exerted on its production. Serbian literary histories have always been framed, exposing a pre-existent formula of history and a concept of development whose result has always already been achieved. In the didactic, nationalist tone of nineteenth-