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Who, exactly, is this Kosta Racin?

Abstract: An overview of the initial reception of Racin and his work in Croatia, through the records left behind by his editors, Party colleagues, and fellow poets.

Keywords: *Racin, Macedonia, Macedonian literature, interwar period, White Dawns*

Starting with 1928, the periodicals of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, particularly those published in Zagreb, featured a number of texts signed by a K. Racin:¹ poems, essays, literary criticism, novellas, short stories, and politically charged columns. The sheer variety of these submissions, coupled with their evident quality, sparked an interest in the identity of this “K. Racin”. The phenomenon is recorded in a

¹ In addition to the pseudonym “Racin”, K. A. Solev also signed his work as “Bodzo” and “Neven Pejko”.

letter from the archives of Stevan Galogaža, where he states that for three years running he’d been hounded by people curious about Racin’s identity but that he’d revealed it to no-one. He notes however that there still remains a possibility of the writer’s cover being blown should he work with a less scrupulous editor. Galogaža’s concerns were not unfounded: the pseudonym of K. Racin hid one of the more prominent illegals of the worker’s movement in Macedonia, Kosta Apostol Solev.

In the interwar period, fraught and dangerous as it was, few Croatians could have said to have met the young potter who was also the first to publish a collection of poetry in the Macedonian language. The purpose of this text is to explore and analyse the sentiment political activists, contemporary authors, poets, culture workers and intellectuals of the time had towards Racin, and what kind of impression his work left.

The Zagreb painter Zlatko Prica had the opportunity to meet Racin and was reminded of medieval frescoes of Macedonian monasteries. He had found the poet's tales of his homeland so vivid and inviting that he felt compelled to visit it, which ultimately resulted in artistic depictions of Prica's impressions of Macedonia. The paintings reveal the depth of Prica's delight and enthusiasm, all inspired by Racin's work. The poet Jura Kaštelan likewise considered Racin a revelation, possessed of an exquisite poetic sensibility and a thoroughly convincing storyteller. Their walks through Zagreb introduced Kaštelan in a sense to a new world, a Macedonia of sorrow and pain but also resistance and heroic spite.

Drago Ivanišević, the poet, playwright and publicist, found the young and self-assured Racin reminiscent of another contemporary poet, I. G. Kovačić, particularly when Racin reci-

ted some of the poems from his collection *Beli mugri* (White Dawns) in the middle of a noisy Zagreb street. He felt proud for the young poet and his book, a small but potent collection that found its way to the publishing houses of Croatia. Finally, Galogaža, one of Racin's editors, saw in him the ideal representative of an enlightened, self-actualised working class, a common man who rose through the ranks and joined the literary world on the sheer strength of his talent and determination. Galogaža is from time to time patronising and tends to interpret Racin solely as a worker-poet, which is where he errs.

Party intellectuals, prominent anti-Fascists such as Ognjen Prica and Otokar Keršovani, saw Racin as a soldier of the Communist Party who was entrusted to them. They were charged with his lodging and security, as well as collecting sufficient funds to have his book printed before he could return to Macedonia. They did this coolly and professionally but the picture would be incomplete without noting their personal sympathy for the young poet. By all accounts, Racin's modest but friendly demeanour and his sense of humour won him friends in both countries. With regards to his contacts in Croatia however, he had a closer and more genuine relationship with Josip Cazi, a Union representative who was his host and played a

significant role in protecting Racin from pursuit by the authorities. With the end of WW2 Cazi had intended to publish his memories of Racin, but this project regrettably never materialised.

Ivo Kozarčanin was among the earliest reviewers of Racin's work and his assessment, based on the poems' stylistic traits and technical quality rather than emotional impact, awarded Racin with a high grade. Another Croatian poet Racin gave his book to was Pavlek Miškin. There is no record of Miškin's thoughts on *Beli mugri* but the two poets respected each other, not least because of their dedication to the plight and protection of the working class.

Those who knew Racin thought of him as Comrade Kočo, a slight, good-humoured but determined and principled man. He comes across as an engaging conversationalist and convincing orator, and a relentless promotor of Macedonia with its tradition, folklore, music, its language and above all its people in the face of their harsh reality. To the rest he was but a name in the papers, K. Racin.

However, even after he parted for his ethereal Macedonian dawns, Racin remained well read and enjoyed, and a subject of numerous academic studies both as a poet and a revolutionary. His place in the history of South East

European literature is that of a phenomenon, an interwar writer who laid down the foundations of contemporary Macedonian poetry, helped preserve and define the country's language, promoted its traditional songs and poems, published the very first book of poems in the Macedonian language, and wrote a manifesto of the new South Slavic literature. In a word, he made a mark on his time, which is why we are free to call the years of his literary production in Macedonia the age of Racin.

His visits to Croatia (Zagreb, Spli, Sušak, Samobor) were no less productive in terms of publication. Croatia is where most of his work was issued, in fact, and where his books found their first outlet. He was respected and protected by his Croatian colleagues and friends, and the publication of *Beli mugri* in Samobor in 1939 can be compared to the feat of publication of Konstantin Miladinov's seminal collection of Macedonian and Bulgarian poetry in 1861, under the patronage of the Bishop Strossmayer. Such events make Croatia and its intellectuals instrumental in the support of the Macedonian people and their struggle to protect and advance their literature, language, and culture.

(соопштение)

Горан Калоѓера

Кој е точно тој, Коста Раџи?

Резиме: Излагањето содржи преглед на рецепцијата на Раџи во Хрватска, низ сведоштвата останати од издавачите, партиските колеги и неговите современици.

Клучни зборови: *Раџи, Македонија, македонска литература, периодот меѓу Двете светски војни, „Бели Мугри“*