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Who's Whose? The Balkan Literary Context

cf. *La situazione linguistica attuale nell'area a standard neoštokavi (ex-serbo-croato)*,
"Studi Slavistici", III, 2006

1. The wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s were followed by strong nationalistic, even xenophobic efforts of nation building fuelled by the political and intellectual elites in the new independent states. The common Serbo-Croatian language, which in the policy of communist Yugoslavia had represented a strong uniting means, was now split up into Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and, more recently, Montenegrin; with different intensity yet equal vehemence these were maintained to be different from the other languages. In Croatia, the first republic (together with Slovenia) to secede from the Yugoslav federation, great efforts have been made from the first days of independence to the current times in order to estrange the vocabulary from the former linguistic community with the Serbs, and the "purity" of the Croatian language is persistently defended by the political and linguistic elite in that country¹. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the situation is roughly the same, but the existence of two constituent parts of the state, the Muslim-Croat Federation, and the Serbian Republic (Republika Srpska, RS), blurs the picture of a united language policy. The Croats in Bosnia maintain their linguistic unity with Croatia, and the Serbs in RS theirs with Serbia, while the Muslims or the Bosniaks² are creating a linguistic purism like the one in Croatia, but

¹ These efforts have in several cases assumed grotesque proportions as for instance in the Croatian language laws which criminalize the use of "non-Croatian" words in official discourse. Linguists and others who maintain the linguistic community with the Serbs are heavily attacked. The weakness of the vocabulary as a discriminating factor between the variants of the Serbo-Croatian language is clearly seen in the fact that words of Croatian origin are adopted in Serbian usage. So while Croatian purists ban non-Croatian words and even invent new ones, the Serbs have adopted and still adopt a large number of Croatian words. Some of these words such as *prozor* (window), *brojka* (cipher), *ishod* (result), *tečaj* (course), *najaviti* (report), *navodno* (allegedly), *suglasnik* (consonant) have completely lost their Croatian distinctive mark and are in current use in Serbia. Words like *sedmica* (week), *konobar* (waiter), *razina* (level), *polaznik* (participant), *nakon* (after), *poput* (as) still have a Croatian mark, but are nevertheless in common usage in Serbia.

² In order to avoid the strictly religious designation, which in former Yugoslavia was used for the "Muslim nation", the present regime has assumed the name *Bosniaks*. According

along different lines. The Croatian purists construct their new-speak vocabulary out of old Croatian elements and compound words, the fundamental purpose of which is to be different from Serbo-Croatian. The Bosniaks on their side revive old Turkish, Arabic and Persian words. But again, the purpose of the linguistic purism is demarcation towards the neighbouring Serbian and Croatian. In Montenegro, which seceded from Serbia in 2006, the political elite and its linguists launched a new sort of linguistic independence. The issue was not, as in Croatia or Muslim Bosnia and Herzegovina, the vocabulary, but a row of phonemic and morphological features which allegedly constituted the special Montenegrin language³. In Serbia no official or serious efforts have been made in order to create a new language or to estrange the Serbian variant of the Serbo-Croatian standard from the other languages. On the contrary new volumes of the large dictionary from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts are still published under the title *Dictionary of the Serbo-Croatian Language* (cf. also Lalević 2004) and it is generally accepted and maintained that the Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and Montenegrins speak the same language. It should be underlined that the existence of a common Serbo-Croatian language does not question the existence of four nations or four independent states, or threatens the nations' identity.

2. In literature, the picture is somewhat different, although the general themes in many respects are the same. When the European national movement spread to the Balkans at the beginning of the 19th century, the Serbs and the Croats adopted nationalism in their struggle for cultural and political independence. This held good for the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. The Muslim population of that area had up until the Austrian occupation in 1878 formed a privileged and conservative class to which modern national sentiments were not only unfamiliar but even contemptuous. After the Austrian occupation and later appropriation, the Muslims found themselves in a new social role, and adopted only slowly and reluctantly nationalism as a means of identification. The Austria-Hungarian imperial minister of finance Béni (Benjamin) Kállay was appointed administrator of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1882 and enforced the idea of a unitary Bosnian nation, consisting of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. This idea was fiercely opposed by the Serbs and the Croats, but only sporadically by the Muslims, which fuelled further interethnic animosity. After the death of Kállay in 1903 the official Austrian policy slowly changed towards an acceptance of the three-ethnic reality in Bosnia.

to 2000 data from the *CIA World Fact Book*, Bosnia's largest ethnic groups are Bosniaks (48%), Serbs (37,1%) and Croats (14,3%). The term *Bosnian* is used as an everyday designation for the language, just like Serbian and Croatian in the respective countries. This does not contradict the linguistic unity of the Serbo-Croatian language.

³ As for the "war" about an independent Montenegrin language, cf. *Jezička situacija u Crnoj Gori – norma i standardizacija*, Podgorica 24-25 May 2007 (in print).

One of the signs of Muslim literary emancipation was the abandonment of the Muslim so-called *alhamiada* literature, i.e. a religious-didactic literature in the Serbo-Croatian language, but written in Arabic script. In 1878 Latin script was officially imposed in Bosnia, but Arabic script, the *Arabica*, was still used for Muslim religious ends. So it was not until this century that modern literary works written by Muslim writers appeared, but still so scattered that one could not talk of a separate and coherent literature⁴. In the Tito-era only two national literatures written in the Serbo-Croatian language, Serbian and Croatian respectively, were accepted as complete categories. Each of them had a long tradition and had developed under different historical and cultural conditions. Due to the lack of a continuous Bosnian literary tradition, writers of Muslim origin declared themselves to belong either to the Serbian or to the Croatian literature, either explicitly or by taking part in the Serbian or Croatian literary life⁵. Textbooks from that time listed not only authors from Serbia and Croatia but also authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina as Serbian or Croatian writers. The reference books or text books underlined a common Yugoslav history of literature and played down the national aspect⁶. This Yugoslav ideology has from time to time played an important if not decisive role in the cultural history of the Balkans. The Croatian Illyric movement in the 1830s and 1840s and the linguistic and literary work of the Serbian scholar Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864) were Yugoslav in their fundamental view. In the 20th century two outstanding literary critics and scholars, the Serb Jovan Skerlić (1877-1914) and the Croat Antun Barac (1894-1955) were clearly Yugoslav orientated, and after WWI the influential literary magazine *Književni Jug* [The Literary South] stressed the common Serbo-Croatian literary aspects. After WWII the Yugoslav ideology once more gained impetus as being one of the ideological foundations of socialist Yugoslavia. In its efforts to promote a Yugoslav common literature, the Encyclopedia of Yugoslav writers from 1971 (Milisavac 1971; Id. 1984), for instance, registered writers from Yugoslavia regardless of their nationality. It should, though, be underlined that Serbian and Croatian literatures still existed as two distinct categories. During the years, monographs about Serbian and Croatian writers as well as of writers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and textbooks of Serbian and Croatian literature were published, but no history of Bosnian literature⁷.

⁴ As in many other countries the first step on the way towards a modern literature started with folk literature. Thus Kosta Hörmann published a collection of Muslim folk songs *Narodne pjesme Muhamedanovaca u Bosni i Hercegovini I-II*, Sarajevo 1888-1889, and Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak, *Narodno blago*, Sarajevo 1888.

⁵ Thus Meša Selimović (1910-1982), in spite of his clearly Muslim name, expressively declared himself as a Serbian writer, while Hasan Kikić (1905-1942) was regarded as a prominent Croatian writer.

⁶ Cf. Barac 1959, and Stefanović, Stanisavljević 1975, a textbook of literature in use in secondary schools all over Yugoslavia (note the singular in both cases: "Yugoslav literature").

⁷ A thorough survey by Muhsin Rizvić was published under the title *Književni život Bosne i Hercegovine između dva rata I-III* [Literary life in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the two wars

3. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the formation of three independent states on the Serbo-Croatian language territory, literature and culture in general have with different intensity been key points in the new nation builders' efforts to secure and stabilize the integrity of their independent status. This has led to a revision of the history of the literature written in Serbo-Croatian.

The view of the extent of the different national literatures, i. e. to which national literature the writers belong, has in some cases resulted in conflict and severe cultural and national infighting. The contending parties accuse one another of *svojtanje*, a sort of *appropriation*, or *litteris potiri* which through the years has been a popular and effective means of national self-assertion. It consists in claiming that certain writers who have been considered to belong to one literature should now be considered, at any rate partly, to belong to another. It is a break with earlier well established traditions and has been felt as an injustice, as an act next to cultural theft, and is a subject of heated polemics not only in the mass media but also among scholars and public institutions⁸.

Of course this appropriation should not be confused with literary contact, or with the fact that authors writing (and speaking) the same language have moved around and for shorter or longer periods of time have settled outside their home country. Strong Yugoslav sentiments during almost 200 years and the state community for 70 years have formed the history of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, and have created a cultural climate where the borders between the national literatures to some extent have been indistinct; here, literature has formed some sort of a common market, where authors were present in other parts of the country and were influenced by other artistic and literary milieus than their own. As the Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić has pointed out, there is a wide span between a banal appropriation on the one hand and literary contacts and community on the other. But the former as well as the latter have been subject of polemics, and there is a tendency to consider the claim that an author is present in two or even three national literatures at the same time as an attempt of "the others" to annex authors who by tradition belonged to only one. We shall not in this paper give an exhaustive enumeration of the many cases of real or alleged appropriation but restrict ourselves to a few illustrative examples.

The most renowned name in Yugoslav literature, Ivo Andrić – Nobel Prize Winner in 1961 – has been the most prestigious object of *svojtanje*: he was born in Bosnia to a catholic family in 1892, made his debut and belonged to the Zagreb literary circles during WWI and the first post-war-years, but moved to Belgrade and joined the Serbian

I-III], Sarajevo 1980, but it was a survey of the cultural currents during a certain period, not at comprehensive history of Bosnian literature. The same holds good for Predrag Palavestra's *Književnost mlade Bosne I-II* [The literature of the Young-Bosnian Movement I-II], Sarajevo 1965.

⁸ These polemics are in my opinion a convincing proof that Serbo-Croatian is one language. There are no similar disagreements between e. g. Slovenian literature on one side and Croatian or Serbian literatures on the other.

literature in the 1920s. Accordingly he now figures as well as a Bosnian (because he was born in Bosnia and chiefly wrote about Bosnia), as a Croatian (because he came from a catholic family and had his literary breakthrough in Croatia), and as a Serbian author (because he spent most of his life in Belgrade, wrote his main works in Belgrade in the Serbian so-called ekavian variant of the Serbo-Croatian language, and explicitly declared himself as a Serbian Writer). Another prestigious writer was Meša Selimović (1910-1982), born in Bosnia, but a declared Serbian writer. In order to get their share of the cake, the Bosniaks have neglected his personally expressed national affiliation in favour of his place of birth and his Muslim name. The same was the case with the Muslim born Hasan Kikić (1905-1942) who had always been considered a Croatian writer, or Skender Kulenović (1910-1978), also of Muslim origin, but a declared Serbian writer.

Since literary appropriation is a revision of history, it would be useful to see how and when revisionism works. When new information has been attained as a consequence of the emergence of new and unknown material, or because of access to hitherto closed archives, historians are sometimes forced to revise history. This holds good also for literary historians. The question is, therefore, whether the new interpretation of the extent of the national literatures is founded on new knowledge. There is no weighty evidence which shows that this is the case. No new relevant facts about the authors' lives or their works have been added to our knowledge about them. The revisionism is apparently based on other presumptions. The political situation and the new nation-building in each country decide the degree of appropriation, or put in other words the past is formed by the present.

4. In Croatia, a comprehensive literary reference book, *Leksikon hrvatskih pisaca* was published in 2000 (Fališevac *et al.* 2000; cf. Solar 2007). In the preface it is expressively stated that the editors have faced difficult dilemmas in deciding which authors belong to the Croatian literature. The editors' criteria are certainly clear enough:

The concept "Croatian author" is here used for all those who wrote in the Croatian language, who were part of the Croatian literary tradition and who acted within the Croatian cultural circle. The concept is also used for those who have declared their clear affiliation to the Croatian literature (e. g. some writers of Serbian or Bosniak origin) [...]. Some of the recorded authors belong *not only* to the Croatian literature: for some of them, double or even triple affiliation is implied and not questioned.⁹

⁹ Fališevac *et al.* 2000: VI-VII: "Pojam 'hrvatski pisac' odnosi se ovdje na sve one koji su pisali hrvatskim jezikom, koji su dio hrvatske književne tradicije i koji su djelovali unutar hrvatskoga kulturnog kruga. Pojam se, isto tako, odnosi i na one koji su iskazivali svoju jasnu pripadnost hrvatske književnosti (npr. neki pisci srpskoga ili bošnjačkoga podrijetla) [...]. Neki uvršteni pisci nisu pripadnici *samo* hrvatske književnosti: kod nekih se dvojna ili čak trojna pripadnost podrazumijeva i ne dovodi u pitanje".

These would seem highly acceptable guidelines for a reasonable survey of the extent of Croatian literature. But the first and most general criterion has the fundamental weakness due to its assumption the Croatian language is distinct and different from the neighbouring Serbian and Bosnian. This assumption is in concordance with official Croatian language policy. We should therefore not expect Serbian and Bosniak writers who wrote in their mother tongue to be able to altogether form part of Croatian literature, even if they “were part of the Croatian literary tradition and acted within the Croatian cultural circle”.

Ivo Andrić was in his youth present in the Croatian cultural circle and published his first poems in the famous anthology *Hrvatska mlada lirika* [The Croatian Young Lyric Poetry] in 1914, but left Croatia and moved to Belgrade in 1920, so it is not correct to maintain that his main works, *The Bridge on the Drina*, *Bosnian Story*, *The Woman from Sarajevo* and *The Damned Yard* belong to Croatian or Bosnian literature, since these works were published 25 years after Andrić had declared himself a Serbian writer, and for years had written in the Serbian variant of the Serbo-Croatian language¹⁰.

Another example of inconsistency in the application of the criteria is the mention of the dramatist Josip Kulundžić (born in Zemun 1899), about whom it is stated: “As he left Croatia at the end of the twenties, and *continued* [P. J.] writing in the Serbian language, K. took directly part in the Croatian literary and theatrical life for only ten years. But to this short period belong his best works [...]”¹¹. Again this renders false the first criterion of the *Leksikon*, that writing in the Croatian language is a necessary condition for belonging to the literature of that country.

The last criterion of the *Leksikon* (“Some of the recorded authors belong not only to the Croatian literature: for some of them, double or even triple affiliation is implied and not questioned”), may possibly be implied and not questioned, but in the case of the renowned Serbian born writer, Vladan Desnica (1905-1967) it is not mentioned that he, like Simo Matavulj (1852-1908), rightfully may belong to the Serbian as well as to the Croatian literature.

5. In Serbia the criteria are somewhat blurred by the fact that since the mentioned Encyclopedia of Yugoslav writers from 1971 no reference book of Serbian writers has been published. There is, meanwhile, evidence in various text books and anthologies of Serbian literature. In a short survey of Serbian literature (Marinković *et al.* 2000), Zlata Bojović, in her essay on the literature of the renaissance and baroque (*ibid.*: 53-73),

¹⁰ To draw a parallel, no one would consider that the works of the Danish born writer Aksel Sandemose (1899-1965), after he left Denmark in 1930 and settled in Norway, belong to the Danish literature.

¹¹ Fališevac *et al.* 2000: 406: “*Budući da je krajem 20-ih otišao iz Hrvatske te dalje pisao srpskim jezikom, K. je u hrvatskome književnom i kazališnom životu izravno sudjelovao samo desetak godina. Tom kratkom razdoblju ipak pripadaju ponajbolja njegova dela [...]*”.

claims that the renaissance literature of Dubrovnik is in fact a part of Serbian literature. One argument is that a number of Serbs from Herzegovina and Serbia immigrated to Dubrovnik in the 16th century, another that Serbian history was a theme of some renaissance writers from Dubrovnik. Another example of origin as the only criterion for literary affiliation is the allegation that the renowned Dubrovnik dramatist Ivo Vojnović is of Serbian origin, and therefore rightly a Serbian writer from Croatia (Ivanić 2005).

6. In Montenegro the situation is further complicated. Since Montenegro seceded from Serbia in 2006, the political elite has made great efforts to dissociate Montenegro as much as possible from Serbia. In spite of the fact that two thirds of the population in a poll has declared Serbian as their mother tongue, the “Montenegrin language” has been proclaimed the official language of the country (cf. note 3). Montenegrin writers, from the bard Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851) to these days have been considered Serbian writers. Now, in the efforts of creating a national Montenegrin literature, all writers who were born in Montenegro or who have resided for a longer or a shorter period in that country are considered to be Montenegrin writers. In an edition *Savremeni crnogorski roman* [The Contemporary Montenegrin Novel], Danilo Kiš, Borisav Pečić, Miodrag Bulatović and Branimir Šćepanović have been included as Montenegrin writers, although they have declared themselves Serbian writers. Šćepanović sued the editors over this inconsistency; Pečić, Bulatović and Kiš – the latter who was not even born in Montenegro – are now dead, but apparently the holders of their copyright have seen fit to decide overnight they should become Montenegrin writers.

7. *Bosnia – An Apple of Discord*. Two opposing views on nation, those of the French and the German, have through history played a decisive role in the Balkans. The French concept sees the state as the basis of the nation, whereas the German emphasizes the cultural and linguistic community. Through the ages the three dominant powers in Eastern Europe, Austria, Zsarist Russia (and its successor The Soviet Union) and Ottoman Turkey, were all three multiethnic states, where state loyalty was more important than national affiliation. The German romantic movement awakened separatist national sentiments in Eastern Europe from the first half of the 19th century and onward. Hungarians, Croats and others revolted against what they perceived as national oppression from the Austrians. After WWI the US President Woodrow Wilson’s principles of national self-determination were supposed to help draw the new map of Europe; these were, however, in most cases neglected and only carried out sparsely across the now battle-scarred continent¹². The creation of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, from 1929 named Yugoslavia, was an example of the lack of interest

¹² Thus Denmark by a plebiscite in 1920 got back Northern Sleswig, which Prussia had conquered in 1864.

in the winning powers to carry out Wilson's plan. After WWII when Yugoslavia had become a socialist state, the national question was solved or maintained to be solved by copying the Stalinist view which underlined the political, territorial and economic community, and the Federal People's Republic Yugoslavia (FNRJ), later The Socialist Federal Republic Yugoslavia (SFRJ) was created. So when the new national revival swept over East Europe in the 1990s and the long and troublesome decline and fall of multinational states had been completed, at least in Europe, the two ways of viewing the national question were harshly confronted in the former Yugoslavia, where centrifugal and centripetal forces clashed, and probably most so in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The inevitable task for Bosnian nation builders was to create a Bosnian national literature.

With the growth of nationalistic and Muslim religious sentiments during the last decades of the 20th century, the Muslim intellectuals rejected the traditional view on literature, that had previously not given sufficient attention to Muslim literature. In 1972, a year after the recognition of the Muslims as a nation, the first anthology of Muslim literature was published (Isaković 1972). All three national groups, the Serbs, the Bosniaks and the Croats were in strong opposition to one another¹³. The solution of the international community to create an independent Bosnian state, consisting of two entities, the Bosniak-Croatian federation and the Serbian Republic did not diminish this clash of religious and national interests. It has been said that Bosnia-Herzegovina is in fact a mini-Yugoslavia, and to some extent this is true. It is a federal state with two entities, three main religions and constituent nations, the uniting factor being no longer Tito, but the so called world community. Both the Serbs and the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a literary tradition, and belonged to respectively the Serbian or Croatian literature. The lack of a national Bosnian literature is certainly felt strongly among the Bosniak nation builders. In order to overcome this want of a continuous tradition, a new category was created: Bosnian literature which consists of Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian literature. This invention of a Bosnian literature brings one more resemblance to former Yugoslav views and to earlier attempts of creating a Yugoslav literature. The criteria for belonging to the Bosnian literature is evidently place of birth, not nationality.

As a consequence of the establishment of two entities it is obvious that the Serbian Republic is, as the name suggests, in almost every respect Serbian. The relations to Serbia proper are tight, and Serbian culture is dominant. In the Muslim-Croat Federation, the competition between the two leading nationalities is heavily felt also in literature. The Bosnian branch of the old Croatian cultural foundation *Matica Hrvatska*, supported by the Croatian ministry of culture, started in 2001 a large project *Hrvatska književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u 100 knjiga* [The Croatian Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 100 Volumes]. Up until now 21 volumes have been published, the last four "a selection of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Nobel Prize Winner Ivo Andrić *The Damned Yard*, *The*

¹³ This apparently persistent opposition is one of the main themes in Ivo Andrić's works about Bosnia.

Bridge on the Drina, *Bosnian Story* and a volume of his short stories". If the concept of a writer's double or triple affiliation is to have any sense or resonance, it must relate to his or her work. We can consent to the view that the very first part of Andrić's work belongs to the Croatian literature, but that his entire opus should be characterized as Croatian or Bosnian or Bosnian-Herzegovinian is out of proportion. Apart from this clear example of *svojatanje*, one wonders how it will be possible to fill up a hundred volumes with Croatian writers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. But, as it is explained in the foreword of the project: "The edition consists of writers who were born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of those who were born outside the country, but who lived and worked in it [...] and not only of those who published their works in books but in their life time did not succeed in that [...]"¹⁴. The principle of lock, stock and barrel seems to be the guiding factor here; a case of blurring the lines for the sake of contextual whole. On their side the Bosniaks have published similar editions, *Muslimanska književnost XX vijeka* (Sarajevo 1991), or *Bošnjačka književnost u 100 knjiga* (Sarajevo 1999-).

The study of literature at the universities in the two entities, the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serbian Republic gives the best indication of the dispute over this important national and cultural issue. Instead of the traditional earlier understanding of literature in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the curriculum of the study of literature at the University of Sarajevo shows in the best way the new "federalistic" concept of Bosnian literature. The boundaries between the three are still maintained. Bosnian writers are listed under their three national literatures. It seems that in principle double "literary nationality" is accepted. A radical change occurred in 2006 when the National and University Library in Sarajevo introduced a new on-line catalogue according to which all writers born in Bosnia and Herzegovina were and are Bosnian writers, regardless of their national affiliation. As a consequence of this, all Bosnian writers wrote and now also write in the Bosnian language. This change fuelled new polemics.

In the Serbian Republic, Bosnian literature as a comprehensive category does not exist. Beside Serbian literature which is a separate and independent study, the study of the other South Slav literatures is situated under a special subject called "Comparative Studies of South Slav Literatures", which consists of Muslim, Croatian, Slovene, Macedonian and Bulgarian literatures, that is, not only literatures written in Serbo-Croatian but also in Slovene, Macedonian and Bulgarian.

8. Due to tradition and the strong conscience of national and religious dividing lines the concept of Yugoslav literature, in spite of political pressure, failed to be accepted. Adolf Muschg's dictum¹⁵ could easily be applied to Yugoslav conditions (cf. Ja-

¹⁴ "Bosna franciscana": "U ediciju su uvršteni hrvatski književnici rodom iz Bosne i Hercegovine, kao i oni koji su rođeni izvan nje a u njoj su živjeli i stvarali [...] i to ne samo oni koji su svoja djela tiskali u knjigama već i oni koji to za života nisu uspjeli učiniti [...]"

¹⁵ To a question about the existence of a Swiss national literature, Adolf Muschg answered (Bondy *et al.* 1995: 2618): "[...] es gibt keine Schweizer Literatur [...] es gibt Autoren

cobsen 1983: 42-45). In Bosnia, where national and religious consciousness is stronger than in the former Yugoslavia, and where the borders between the national literatures are still maintained although under different designations, the prospects of a united Bosnian literature are not promising. The attempt of the National and University Library in Sarajevo to impose the category of Bosnian literature was met with strong protest from the Serbian and Croatian side, and the new system was withdrawn.

In the ongoing polemics language is the key problem, because Serbo-Croatian is a polycentric language like English or German and a lot of other languages (Kordić 2005: 83-85; Kordić 2006). There are no problems in deciding whether a given writer was English or Irish or American, German or Austrian. Although Icelandic writers such as Jóhann Sigurjónsson (1880-1919), Guðmundur Kamban (1888-1945) or Gunnar Gunnarsson (1889-1975) wrote in Danish, nobody would consider them to belong to the Danish literature. By the same token, we in Denmark do not consider Henrik Ibsen “our dramatist” simply because he wrote *A Doll's House* in Danish.

A doubtful argument, at least in the Balkans, is national affiliation or origin. In a region which is so ethnically mixed as the Balkans it is sometimes useless to insist on nationality. Due to the turbulent history of the Balkans as well as to periods of more peaceful coexistence, it is in some cases difficult to decide whether a certain author should belong to one or another national literature. In an essay, the Croatian scholar Predrag Matvejević mentions a long row of Croatian and Serbian outstanding writers and artists who were of very “mixed” origin, but concludes at the end with an observation that he could mention many more examples, “but I am not sure that it would help those who view culture in ‘ethnically clean’ categories”. (Matvejević 2005). According to Matvejević the renowned Serbian writer Milorad Pavić’s father was a Croat, and his mother Serbian. Pavić has chosen (his reasons for this choice are unimportant) to be a Serbian writer, but he could as well have chosen to be a Croatian writer.

We do not consider that a writer’s choice of theme decides his or her literary affiliation. Karen Blixen, for example, wrote extensively about Africa but cannot be said to be an African writer; in the same way neither Ivo Andrić or Meša Selimović, both of whom wrote about Bosnia, nor renaissance writers in Dubrovnik chronicling Serbian history, are made Bosnian or Serbian writers respectively.

None of the above mentioned criteria is valid alone. Of course the greater part of Serbian or Croatian writers can undeniably and without polemic be placed in their respective literary landscape. A group of writers with a more mixed background may be difficult. So, personal choice must decide. When asked, the living authors as a rule state that they belong to this or that literature, or that they in fact do not care. The real *svojtanje* is a hunt for dead souls.

There is no doubt that on the Serbo-Croatian language area as a whole, politics

aus der Schweiz [...]”. (“[...] there is no Swiss literature [...], there are writers from Switzerland [...]).

have overruled the basic principles in dealing with national literatures, known from other polycentric languages, such as English or German. It may be useful, therefore, to draw the attention to some well established logical procedures on deciding the national affiliation of writers. Basically, independent literary historians, not politicians or librarians should decide who belongs to one or possibly more national literatures. It is obvious that no single criterion will do in deciding the affiliation of a writer. In the Serbo-Croatian cultural reality, tradition should play a more important role than language, and personal decision a more important role than place of birth.

If a logical calculus is followed, further confusion may be avoided.

POSTULATE N. 1:

Premise: *All writers who write in English belong to the English literature.*

Premise: *Karen Blixen writes in English.*

Conclusion: *Karen Blixen is an English writer.*

This argument is invalid. Besides Karen Blixen (who is a Danish writer) American, Australian, Irish, Indian or Pakistani writers write in English.

POSTULATE N. 2:

Premise: *All writers who are born in a certain country belong to the literature of that country.*

Premise: *Eugène Ionesco was born in Romania*

Conclusion: *Eugène Ionesco is a Romanian writer.*

Postulate n. 2 is also invalid, because there are writers who are born in a certain country but do not belong to the literature of that country. Ionesco is considered to be a French writer.

POSTULATE NO. 3:

Premise: *All writers who are born in Canada and write in the English language belong to the Canadian literature.*

Premise: *Saul Bellow was born in Canada.*

Conclusion: *Saul Bellow is a Canadian writer.*

Postulate no. 3 is another example of an invalid axiome, because Saul Bellow belongs not to the Canadian but, according to his personal decision, to the American literature.

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Abstract

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Who's Whose? The Balkan Literary Contest

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the independence of some states, a new historical and literary practice has been introduced. According to this practice, the traditional point of view about national literatures has been changed. Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins and Bosnians introduced new criteria of literary belonging, every one with its weak points, since these criteria result not effective when an author belongs to two or more literatures (Ivo Andrić). This particular kind of literary revision, typical of the Balkans, is called *svojtanie*.

In this paper we present all these criteria, focusing our attention on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bosnia's builders heavily perceived the lack of a national Bosnian literature, and now they are asking for Croatian and Serbian writers, born in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to be considered as belonging to Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature.

In the last pages of the paper the literary situation of Yugoslavia is compared with that of other countries, where literary belonging is not a problem and personal writers' choices are respected.