

FOREWORD A VISIONARY OR A UTOPIAN?

The person of Dimitrije Mitrinovic (1887–1953) remained an enigma to many contemporaries. His early association with the Young Bosnia literary, national and revolutionary movement in Bosnia is well-known since in that period (1908–1914), he published his articles in the leading literary journals of Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb. However, he spent most of his life in Great Britain (1914–1953) where he was the leader of small semi-esoteric circles during the Great War and in the early 1920s, president of the Adler Society (1927–1932), instigator of the New Europe Group (1931–1957), unofficial but real leader of the New Britain Movement (1932–1934), and, in the 1930s and 1940s, master and leader of his own group of 30–40 very devoted British followers. Throughout all these activities he was a very dedicated lecturer, but his lectures were mostly delivered before a private audience of his own followers and narrow outside circles. Very occasionally, he personally wrote newspaper articles and essays for *The New Age* (1920–21), *Purpose* (1929) and a series of journals associated with the New Britain Movement (1932–34). His published texts can offer only a partial insight into his ideas and concepts. He seems to have planned to outline his own philosophical and theoretical system in a form of a monograph, but he never did so, probably due to his deteriorating health. Researchers are, therefore, faced with the problem of how to approach his legacy. The written testimonies we have at our disposal do not necessarily help since they offer rather different and sometimes conflicting interpretations of his teachings.

He left many boxes of correspondence, drafts, lectures, newspaper cuttings and also his own private library, which contained some 6,000 books. After his death, his disciples and followers made the New Atlantis Foundation (NAF) in his last house in Richmond upon Thames. The members of the Foundation diligently categorised and annotated materials from his archives. Since a lot of his correspondence was in German, Serbo-Croat and other languages, they also translated into English substantial parts of his archive. Many barely legible handwritten notes were typed owing to the efforts of NAF. The Foundation's main purpose was to preserve his memory, but its members were also very much concerned with the interpretation of the legacy of their spiritual leader, and this focus was not always helpful to researchers.

Three parallel lines of research on Mitrinovic developed since the 1960s. First, Belgrade scholar and literary historian Predrag Palavestra (1930–2014) published, in 1965, his doctoral dissertation *Literature of Young Bosnia*, and in the second volume, he edited texts written by the followers of this literary movement whose intellectual leader was Dimitrije Mitrinovic.¹ The following year, in 1966, he began his project of identifying and editing the collected works of Dimitrije Mitrinovic in Serbo-Croat, as the language was known at that time. In this endeavour, he faced various kinds of opposition directed both against him and his object of study. By his own testimony, the books were ready to be printed two or three times for the publisher, “but always some different reasons were found not to publish these books. Once I was not appropriate, on another occasion it was Mitrinovic. He was a ‘mystic’, I was an ‘anticommunist...’”² Having failed to issue the collected works of Mitrinovic, Palavestra published in 1977 his monograph *Dogma and Utopia of Dimitrije Mitrinovic. The Beginnings of the Serbian Literary Avantgarde*.³ It was the first scholarly monograph on Mitrinovic. He was allowed to use the archives of NAF in 1966/67,⁴ but his co-operation with NAF ended after he refused to accept some of their requests in 1974.⁵ In 1989, he was able to renew his project of the collected works of Dimitrije Mitrinovic, and they were finally published in 1991 in Sarajevo in three volumes in Serbian/Serbo-Croat, only a few months before the Wars of Yugoslav Succession broke out in Sarajevo and Bosnia. This prevented for many years the distribution of the collected works published after 25 years of continual efforts.

The second line of research of Mitrinovic was undertaken by Andrew Rigby. Despite incredible obstacles and opposition that Predrag Palavestra faced to publish the works of Mitrinovic in communist Yu-

- 1 Predrag Palavestra, *Književnost Mlade Bosne* (Svjetlost: Sarajevo, 1965), Vol. 1: 300 p. Predrag Palavestra (ed.), *Književnost Mlade Bosne. Hrestomatija* (Svjetlost: Sarajevo, 1965), Vol. 2: 415 p.
- 2 Transcript of a part of an interview given by Predrag Palavestra to the Radio Television Belgrade in 1992, in S. G. Markovic (ed.), “Jedan vek rasprava o Sarajevskom atentatu”, a thematic issue of *Hereticus*, Vol. 13 (2015), Nos. 1–2, 175–176.
- 3 Predrag Palavestra, *Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića. Počeci srpske književne avantgarde* (Belgrade: Slovo ljubve, 1977).
- 4 The result of this co-operation was his article: Predrag Palavestra, “Dimitrije Mitrinovic and the Literature of ‘Young Bosnia’”, *Renaissance Bulletin* (for private circulation), No. 13 (Spring 1967).
- 5 Predrag Palavestra, *Nekropolje. Biografski eseji* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike and Dosije Studio, 2012), 32–34. *Critique of the Last Chapter of Dr. Predrag Palavestra’s book Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića by the Trustees of the New Atlantis Foundation* (Ditchling: New Atlantis Foundation, 1980). ULSM SC “Fonds Dimitrije Mitrinović“, 1.

goslavia, NAF did not look favourably on his 1977 book. They made a private English translation of his book and prepared their own private reply to Palavestra's book in 1980.⁶ They were particularly upset by the fact that Palavestra viewed Mitrinovic as a utopian thinker and may have misunderstood the nuances and connotative meanings of certain words in Serbo-Croat.⁷ They decided to encourage another author to write the biography of Mitrinovic that would also include testimonies of his associates who were still alive and active in NAF in the 1980s. The result was the book by Andrew Rigby published in 1984 in a very well-respected American series that published books on Eastern Europe during the Cold War.⁸ This book made Mitrinovic much better known, at least among Balkan scholars. As Thomas Emmert remarked in his review: "Dimitrije Mitrinovic is not exactly a household name – even among some Balkan scholars. He should be, however..."⁹ Emmert also called Mitrinovic "a fascinating twentieth century thinker."¹⁰ The reviewer for the *American Historical Review*, however, described him as "a failed guru."¹¹ Rigby's book offered further insights into various activities that Mitrinovic conducted in the United Kingdom, and he viewed his "utopia" as a way "to believe in the human power to transform the given in the direction of a potential reality." It was essentially "to dare to dream about how the world might be reconstructed."¹² Rigby's second edition of the book was made widely available due to free access.¹³ Research on Mitrinovic was further enriched, in 1987, by the publication of the selected writings of Mitrinovic, edited by H. C. Rutherford, his loyal follower and one of the Trustees of NAF. It was published in the same series as Rigby's book.¹⁴

Mitrinovic's ideas could also be viewed in the context of similar ideas and concepts that circulated around Europe in the inter-war period. To understand him and like-minded spirits, one would have to conceptualise them within European intellectual and cultural history. In 1999, the Italian historian Luisa Passerini published her book *Europe in Love. Love in Eu-*

6 *Critique of the Last Chapter of Dr. Predrag Palavestra's book.*

7 See appendix one of *Critique of the Last Chapter of Dr. Predrag Palavestra's book*, 32-33.

8 Andrew Rigby, *Initiation and Initiative. An Exploration of the Life and Ideas of Dimitrije Mitrinović* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984).

9 Thomas A. Emmert, "Andrew Rigby. Initiation and Initiative...", *Canadian-American Slavic Studies/Revue Canadienne-Américaine d'Études Slaves*, Vol. 19/2 (1985), p. 235.

10 *Ibid.*

11 George Feaver, "Andrew Rigby. Initiation and Initiative...", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), 118.

12 Andrew Rigby, *Initiation and Initiative*, 192.

13 Andrew Rigby, *Dimitrije Mitrinović. A Biography* (William Sessions Ltd., 2006).

14 H. C. Rutherford (ed.), *Certainly, Future. Selected Writings by Dimitrije Mitrinović* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1987).

rope and did exactly that. The third chapter of the book is entitled “New Europe” and largely deals with the legacy of Mitrinovic and his associates. They were described as “extraordinary characters” and the author followed the idea of a new Europe as a “utopia”, but the word got a new meaning. Proponents of New Europe, in other words Mitrinovic and his associates, were those “who had the strength of great utopianism when they envisaged a future European federation based on regional autonomy and on the premise of a general psychic change...”¹⁵ The immense success of this book made Mitrinovic’s activities better known to a much wider audience, and the book also contributed to the necessary contextualisation of his work and activities. The contribution on Mitrinovic by Zoran Milutinović from 2011 followed the same line,¹⁶ as well as the monograph by Guido van Hengel.¹⁷

On May 28, 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, an international hybrid conference was organised in Belgrade by the Anglo-Serbian Society and the Centre for British Studies of the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade. The conference gathered 13 experts from the United Kingdom, Serbia, the Netherlands and Italy, and was entitled “Dimitrije Mitrinovic and his Legacy”. Encouraged by the conference, the organisers have decided to prepare an edited volume. At the beginning of 2022, two participants of the conference became team members of the project “Europe-Serbia from the 19th to the 21st Century – CTES”, and it was therefore decided to further develop the initiative on the volume within the framework of this project.

This collection of papers aims to present the findings on Mitrinovic and some of his associates and circles following all three of the above-mentioned lines of research of his legacy and to include various disputed points concerning his legacy including political contexts, colonial legacy, ethnic and cultural stereotypes.¹⁸ Efforts have also been made to gather experts and specialists who are engaged in institutions that preserve the funds and books of Mitrinovic or that deal with his legacy.

The title of the volume, *A Reformer of Mankind. Dimitrije Mitrinovic between Cultural Utopianism and Social Activism*, reflects the contradictions and

15 Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe. Imagination and Politics in Britain between the Wars* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 16.

16 Zoran Milutinović’s essay on Mitrinovic which is republished in this collection followed the same line. Zoran Milutinović, *Getting over Europe. The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2011), 167–180.

17 Guido van Hengel, *De zieners* (Amsterdam: Ambo/Anthos, 2018).

18 The first effort of this kind was made in December 2013 when Nemanja Radulović organised the round table “Dimitrije Mitrinović and New Age” at the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade. Efforts to publish papers from this conference were finally realised in 2022. Nemanja Radulović (ed.), *Dimitrije Mitrinović, New Perspectives* (Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 2022).



Cover page of the Collected Works of Dimitrije Mitrinovic (1991), Vol. 1, edited by P. Palavestra



Cover page of Critique of the Last Chapter (1980), prepared by the New Atlantis Foundation



Cover page of Initiation and Initiative (1984) by Andrew Rigby



Cover page of Europe in Love. Love in Europe (1999) by Luisa Passerini

debates surrounding this elusive personality. The word “utopianism” in the title may be read both as a lack of realism or as a potential source of wider insights. As Krishan Kumar pointed out, at the end of the 20th century, the Western world was very much under the impression of the spectacular failure of “the Enlightenment’s greatest utopia, the utopia of socialism.” He also suggested that utopia could also be about “inventing and imagining worlds for our contemplation and delight. It opens up our minds to the possibilities of the human condition.”¹⁹ Mitrinovic was involved in both: certain kinds of socialist experiments and new possibilities of the human condition. His cultural utopianism meant that he viewed culture as the main source of potential reform of mankind. To do that he initiated a series of socially relevant activities in London in the period 1927–1953.

The poet Edwin Muir noted the following on Mitrinovic:

He was the man for whom only the vast processes of time existed. He did not look a few centuries ahead like Shaw and Wells, but to distant milleniums, which to his apocalyptic mind were as near and vivid as tomorrow... Mitrinović was often in our house; he would arrive with a large bottle of beer under each arm and talk endlessly about the universe, the creation of the animals, the destiny of man, the nature of Adam Kadmon, the influence of the stars, the objective science of criticism...²⁰

From the testimonies of his contemporaries Mitrinovic may be viewed as a utopian and a visionary, a dreamer and a social activist in one. This is reflected in the title of this volume.

I would like to express my gratitude to I&F Grupa for having sponsored the conference and its CEO, Mr Srdjan Šaper, who has since the late 1970s demonstrated a keen interest in this topic and supported this project in all of its phases. I owe special thanks to the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade for the decision to co-publish this monograph, and to its Dean, Prof. Dragan R. Simić, who personally initiated a project on Mitrinovic three decades ago. Ms. Slavka Stevanović and Zepter Book World have decided to co-publish this book, for which I am personally indebted.

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¹⁹ Krishan Kumar, “Apocalypse, Millennium and Utopia Today”, in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 214, 219.

²⁰ Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1968, 1st ed. 1940), 174-175.

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