

Dragana Mihailović

University Library “Svetozar Marković”, Belgrade

THE LEGACY OF DIMITRIJE MITRINOVIĆ

Abstract: Mitrinović’s work is shrouded in a veil of secrecy, “with a mystery that springs from the opacity of his writing practice”,¹ from his intriguing personality and his conspiratorial tendency to act within narrow circles of chosen individuals, dedicated to studying *other knowledge* and those guided by the idea of rearranging the world in all its aspects. Nobody has talked about him for decades. One gets the impression that he has been systematically forgotten in the history of Yugoslav culture, for the unity of which – political, social and cultural, he strongly advocated.

An exhaustive study of Mitrinović’s life and literary work entitled “The Dogma and Utopia of Dimitrije Mitrinović” by academician Predrag Palavestra was published in 1977, which represents the most comprehensive source, a starting point and basis for any research on truly intriguing life of Dimitrije Mitrinović. Mitrinović’s three-volume *Collected Works*,² which contains the first translations of his essays written during his stay in Germany and England and his bibliography, were published in 1991 by the publishing house Svjedost Sarajevo, thanks to the persistence of editor Predrag Palavestra. As they were published in a small print run, due to the war in ex-Yugoslavia, they were almost lost. One of the rare copies of the book, together with his personal library, has been preserved in the Svetozar Marković University Library. At this year’s international conference under the title “Dimitrije Mitrinović and His Legacy”, both Mitrinović’s legacies were presented – the one preserved by the University Library in Bradford and the one in the Svetozar Marković University Library in Belgrade.

Keywords: Mitrinović’s legacy preserved by the Belgrade University Library, the creative critique of Dimitrije Mitrinović, Mitrinović’s idea of a united Europe.

Special collections and legacies preserved in the University Library

The University Library keeps special collections of prominent scholars from Serbia and other countries. Special efforts have been made in order to digitise the library materials. The University Library has digitised old Serbian newspapers as part of the *Europeana Newspapers* project. It has contributed to this project with 400,000 digitised newspaper pages. The Library was built with the funds of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and thanks to this fact the Library has special relations with various institutions in the USA and the United Kingdom, as well as a rich collection of books in English.

1 Obrad Savić, “Mitrinović’s psychoanalytic letter “, in *Delo*, Nos. 9/10 (1988), p. 184.

2 Vol. 1: On Literature and Art; Vol. 2: Aesthetic and Programme Papers; Vol. 3: Poetry and Anthroposophy.

The University Library has in its holdings over 30 separate libraries, which are organized as separate units of different size and importance. Their value is great in terms of their content and as a testimony of the people to whom they belonged.

On Dimitrije Mitrinović's special library (PB19) kept in the Belgrade University Library

Dimitrije Mitrinović selected 2,200 titles (about 2,800 volumes) from his personal library in Richmond, which consisted of about 6,000 books, and bequeathed them to the Belgrade University Library. The books were received in 1956 and, at his request, they were arranged, as a separate unit, in the same order as in the library in his house in Richmond and kept in our library under reference number PB19. Mitrinović's collection includes books on philosophy, ethnology, anthropology, oriental studies, art, esoteric doctrines and gives us an insight into his wide-ranging interests. It also contains numerous papers on mythology, psychology, religion, as well as Chinese, Assyrian, Ancient Egyptian, Japanese, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Ancient Persian, Coptic, Sumerian and Tibetan grammars, dictionaries of hieroglyphs... This special library includes his complete works, prepared by Predrag Palavestra and published by *Svetlost Sarajevo* in 1991. As they were published in a small print run, due to the war in ex-Yugoslavia, they were almost lost. One of the rare copies of his complete works has been preserved as a legacy by our library. This legacy also contains a collection of his essays entitled "Third Force", written during the forty-year period he spent in England and published in Belgrade in 2004, which were translated by Gordana Mitrinović-Omčikus. The library also keeps his lectures – 25 texts on anthropo-philosophy in English, recorded by his long-time associate Winifred Gordon Fraser, which were published in the *New Atlantis Bulletin*, as well as selected issues of the *New Atlantis* journal, which he edited.

In an effort to remind the public of the importance and relevance of Mitrinović's ideas in the cultural history of Europe, in 2008, the University Library organized an exhibition of the most representative publications from his personal library with the accompanying publication entitled "The Creative Critique of Dimitrije Mitrinović".³ An International Round Table dedicated to Mitrinović was held in 2013 and an exhibition of essays on esoteric doctrines from his library was organized by Nemanja Radulović and Dragana Mihailović. A retrospective cataloguing project is

3 Dragana Mihailović and Gordana Lazarević, „The Creative Critique of Dimitrije Mitrinović“ (Belgrade: University Library “Svetozar Marković“ and Službeni Glasnik, 2008).

underway, including the classification of the old holdings of the University Library and the process of data entry into the unified search system to make all titles from Dimitrije Mitrinović's library searchable through the electronic database COBISS.

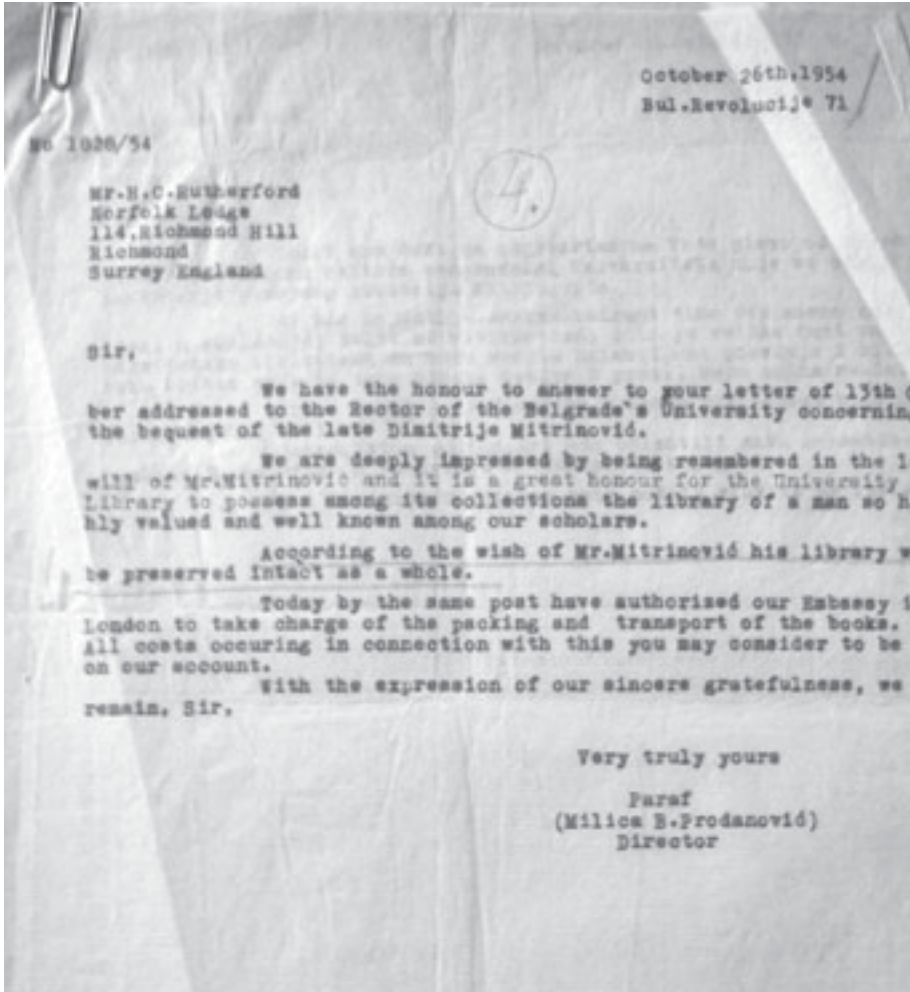
Mitrinović's personal library gives us an insight into his wide-ranging interests and points to the works of the authors who influenced him, whose importance he often emphasized and whom he considered to be true *creative critics*.

The Creative critique of Dimitrije Mitrinović

Dimitrije Mitrinović considered his literary and publicistic work a kind of direct political action. In his earliest texts and poetry, until his last public appearance in 1950, there was a continuity of an idea elaborated in all later works, to be precise, an imperative not to accept the existing reality, the idea that a self-conscious man has an opportunity and responsibility to fundamentally change the world, divided by politics, religions and races, by reassessing existing values and revealing social dogmas and taboos. The Nietzschean ideal of a new man, a citizen of the world, a free and powerful all-man, who, as such, bears responsibility for enlightening and moving the masses to establish a more humane world, runs through almost all his works. The new world would be built on the highest values of the human spirit, transcending the religious and racial framework – an idea that, while being developed, extended its scope from the united Yugoslav and Balkan peoples, through united Europe, to a planetary vision of a unified community of all people. Mitrinović's thought evolved, like the views of his contemporaries, intellectuals active at the beginning of the First World War, especially Miloš Djurić and Nikolaj Velimirović, from the Vidovdan ethics and pan-Slavic views to the philosophy of pan-humanism and the vision of a decisive role of the All-Man in the cultural and spiritual transformation of the entire mankind.

Mitrinović accepted the Stoic openness to bringing philosophy closer to human life, i.e. the endeavour to prioritize the practical problems of humanity over purely theoretical problems (that's what attracted him to Kant). In Mitrinović's later works, we recognize the principles of Marcus Aurelius – living in accordance with nature, learning from history, learning lessons of wisdom from the centuries of accumulated experience in order to strengthen new, universal principles of true human existence, to be free ("you will be free only if you do not let the flow of things take your soul").⁴ These are the foundations on which Mitrinović's political, literary and philosophical thought developed.

4 Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Philosopher Marcus Aurelius", in Dimitrije Mitrinović's *Collected Works*, (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), Vol. 2, 30.



Letter of the director of the University Library "Svetozar Marković" in Belgrade dated October 26, 1954, confirming their readiness to fulfil the last wish of Dimitrije Mitrović to receive a part of his library

Our age of glorification of technical achievements and marginalization of humanities and social sciences, especially philosophy, requires a strong reaffirmation of the solution offered by Mitrinović to all mankind, which implies the pragmatization of philosophy and the establishment of a comprehensive “Philosophy of Culture” as a theory for all practitioners. This premise is close to the views of Miloš Djurić, according to whom the universal spirit, which emerges in the sphere of ethics, philosophy of culture and literature, remains an ideal for all areas of human activity, contrasting philosophy that is inseparable from life to closed philosophical and scientific thought. Dimitrije Mitrinović goes even further – he believes that science and technology should be humanized, art democratized, the inherited treasures from the past collected, checked, revived and used fairly for the progress of all. He contrasted living philosophy with fruitless speculations, as wisdom in which the world is not only reflected, but also governed. “Making life better is its skill. The reflection of life is not as it is.”⁵ As the only meaningful path that Mitrinović sees, he consistently adheres to this idea from his early works, first in the *Democratisation of Science and Philosophy*, to the clearly formulated idea in *Aesthetic Contemplations*, elaborated in his later works from his post-emigration period – *World Events*, *Creative Critique*, *Third Force* and *The Three Revelations*. The burden of this radical change is borne by a new free and self-conscious man, a man of the future, who should share with others the strength of his will, the fearlessness of his courage, a man who should be “an indomitable rebel against evil and against the violent truths for a dream”.⁶ This was Marinetti’s *uomo moltiplicato* or the “multiplied man” for the Futurists, the *Übermensch* or “Overman” for Nietzsche, “the all-man” – the man with highly developed ethical consciousness for Mitrinović and Miloš Djurić.

Nietzsche’s struggle against the achievements of Western civilization is actually Dimitrije Mitrinović’s struggle against the belief that something else is a measure and value of the human race and that abstract justice exists beyond our world. The human race itself is the measure of all things, Mitrinović insists. „Aren’t God and the human race one and the same? God and Apeiron – aren’t they the same being? The Holy Trinity is God. Power, Reason and Love are the components of the entire human nature and the basis of Nature... Hope, however, is the basis and essence from which existence itself is made. Faith is the mother of understanding. Mercy, Giving, Nobility and Compassion are love.”⁷ Justice is not a superhuman force or a category above the human race. It means that there

5 Dimitrije Mitrinović, “Aesthetic Contemplations”, in Dimitrije Mitrinović’s *Collected Works*, (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), Vol. 2, 117–121.

6 Ibid, 138

7 *New Age*, 22.09.1921.

is a possibility for a meaningful and humane organization of the world. "We just need to lean our heads closer to each other and ask each other: How much do you know?" What do you think? Can we? The salvation of civilization lies in this idea of universal justice: in the synthesis and mutual exchange of personal functions; in the search for human truth lies the ruling sense of Culture, the key to the future."⁸ How simple this noble solution to our existential problems seems, which is so unsustainable in our reality. It seems that we have not yet reached the cultural stage in our evolution⁹ about which Mitrinović wrote immediately after the war sufferings and the greatest crisis of collective human freedom: „Humanity is entering adulthood ... Our world has become, historically, one world. We have discovered that it became our common home, which is truly homogeneous. Our kingdom has become the community and family of all people."¹⁰ Mitrinović talks about the new philosophy of culture as a *creative critique* that would encompass all previous studies about man and God and thoughts about God-man's goodness, for the final re-creation of the world into a new spiritual unity. The question about meaning and purpose – *To what purpose?* – is the key question of this philosophy, not the questions: *Why? How?* and *What?* The meaning of the new philosophy, as the wisdom of creating and intertwining all knowledge, lies in its humanization, the usage of all abilities and skills tailored to man and for the sake of man.

According to Mitrinović's deep conviction, humanity should begin to unite all threads of life into a meaningful whole, based on the insight into the deep interdependence of all people and things in the world. From the perspective of Mitrinović's understanding of the course of human history, there will no longer be great geniuses, prophets and artists. There will no longer be original ideas in philosophy, revelations in religion or fresh artistic inspirations. That is not a sign of decadence, but a sign of a new age, a new level of existence. Mitrinović repeats the words of John Gould Fletcher, who says that there is something ordinary in the very nature of a genius. A genius is not a man of greatness, he does not feel particularly sublime compared to other people. He feels the sublimity of humanity, explains Mitrinović. Therefore, the concept is just the opposite – he stands out from the masses because others do not feel the same as he does. "In ancient times," Mitrinović writes, criticizing the imposed views of modern Western civilization, "there were no geniuses as we consider

8 Dimitrije Mitrinović, "Marx and Nietzsche as the historic background of Adler", in Dimitrije Mitrinović's *Collected Works* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), Vol. 3, 129.

9 We are bitterly aware of the fact that historical progress does not necessarily coincide with moral progress.

10 *New Age*, 22.09.1921.

them today [...] It happened later, only when big countries made people feel small and divided. Every man was comforted by the thought that he was special and unique. A talented man was admired, but, at the same time, exceptionality and uniqueness were envied. People began to come into conflict with each other and strive to become geniuses, exaggerating and competing in learning or inventing mechanical devices, or in disrespecting others [...] Nietzsche turned his back on all these unworthy competitions and accepted the problem of a Man as more important than the problem of a Genius, treated in that way. He has no respect for such greatness, but only for a man who surpasses himself [...] As such, individuals are a bridge to a higher individuality that can only command itself and obey itself... Truth, the illness of our age is the need to organize life, a joint conspiracy against personality and being and against what it is sacred to be human. Going beyond the limits of the imposed convictions, in liberating, maintaining and enhancing the very vision of life we find the true nature of the human personality [...] It is with Nietzsche that compels us to follow his eagle flight, in which he despises the earth beneath him, while not even an insect can escape his gaze. We recognize it in the sensitive soul of Dostoevsky, in his underground world of crime and madness [...] because, in literature, as everywhere else, personality is human nature itself [...] Humanity is me!",¹¹ says Mitrinović.

At the very end of his essay published in the *Purpose* magazine in 1930, Mitrinović warns of the other extreme of tyranny of the modern world, the opposite of uniformity and organization – he calls it separatism and atomism, meaning the imposed contrasts and divisions of our world, “barren contrasts” that are nothing but “the illusory abstractions that we derived from the reality of a being.” Community and individuality are equally abstract and false ideas, Mitrinović believes, and only in the light of true personal humanity, in their interaction, these two terms make sense. “Beware of these extremes, all of you who would avoid spiritual frustration and despair! Because in each of us there is a reality that is not a false idea, dichotomy or two contradictions... Humanity and the integrity of the entire world reside in the heart.”¹² A call to connect all the extremes of the previous world and to permeate all the phenomena of life – everything and everybody together – is the fundamental idea elaborated in his works. Without a deep noble sense of human unity, it is not possible to perceive and understand the meaning of the entire human community or fundamentally and finally defeat the various forms of inhuman value systems and tyrannical authorities. “Mankind is One Man;

¹¹ Dimitrije Mitrinović, “The Principles of a Genius”, in Dimitrije Mitrinović’s *Collected Works*, (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), Vol. 3, 143–146.

¹² *Ibid.* 146.

and this should be supplemented with the claim that each man is that Man. Each man is individual and universal at the same time, both Man and Mankind. Beneath individual consciousness and functions lies a collective, racial, and perhaps even deeper consciousness, in which each of us moves, lives, and has his own being.”¹³ It is clear in what sense Jung’s thought was close to him. Dimitrije Mitrinović deeply felt that, behind all the differences of religions and races, the same spiritual essence lies in us. Since the unity of consciousness is common to all life, an individual is complete only when he self-consciously participates in it.

Mitrinović believed that a fresh influx of a few great and creative people was no longer necessary and instead called for the creativity of all. It is an age of new and different creativity – the recognition and evaluation of the best in our history, thoughtful and critical adoption of the past. “We do not need to know all the works of Beethoven, Michelangelo, Swedenborg, Leibniz, Kant. But we need to preserve their essence“, explained Mitrinović, talking about the *creative critique*. “The work of a genius can be experienced only if it is translated into another discourse”,¹⁴ which is available to everybody. In this context, he devised the concept of an encyclopedia in which an essay on a particular term or thing could be written from different aspects – a tree could be described from the aspect of a botanist, carpenter, painter, poet, in every possible relationship with man and nature. From this perspective, everybody would appreciate human heritage, and in this way, everybody could participate in discovering, creating and fulfilling the meaning of life, Mitrinović believed. In discovering and creating new relations among religion, philosophy, science and art for the purpose of enriching life itself, lies the essence and role of Mitrinović’s *creative critique*. “Most people possess some creative skills in themselves. These skills can be developed through the creative critique. Every man is gifted with an imaginative interpretation and is capable of reproducing the essence of an original work of art or philosophy in another form. From now on, culture must be personal culture. This is the time of critical and personal life and only that can save us.”¹⁵ A decade before the famous intellectual and political activist Jean-Paul Sartre, Mitrinović demanded the responsibility of each person for humanity: ““Let every human being be responsible for the whole world!”¹⁶

13 *New Age*, 19.08.1920.

14 Dimitrije Mitrinović, *New Britain*, 31.05.1933.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*



Cover page of Creative Critique of Dimitrije Mitrinović, a catalogue prepared by Dragana Mihailović and Gordana Lazarević in 2008 for the exhibition on Dimitrije Mitrinović organised in the entrance hall of the University Library "Svetozar Marković" in Belgrade

Advocating the idea of a united Europe¹⁷ more than three decades before its realization, before the critique of totalitarianism, the need to substantially change the existing values and establish a new axiology based on ancient values, the idea of panhumanism and ecumenism in contrast to the escalation of religious fanaticism, threats posed by rapid

17 In September 1914, Mitrinović published an article in *The Outlook* magazine entitled „Who should possess Trieste“, in which, in addition to general political issues, he presented his personal ideas and visions about the Balkan federation and the formation of the „third Balkans“. The same year, he began to advocate the idea of a united Europe, an ideal starting point and basis for the realization of a much broader and comprehensive vision of the future world order.

technological development and, consequently, possible environmental catastrophe, Mitrinović anticipated the tendencies of the modern society and the problems that 'humanity is facing today. Dušan Pajin deals with this aspect of Mitrinović's work in his essays and lectures on Dimitrije Mitrinović, especially in the essay on Mitrinović presented at the International Conference "Ideas on Europe", held in Navarre to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the European Union, in which he made a comparison between Mitrinović's ideas on a single European union at a time when it seemed utopian with modern principles and the EU programme. In his essay "New Europe and Dimitrije Mitrinović", Dušan Pajin explains that Mitrinović's vision of the European federation emerged during his stay in Munich, where he joined a group of European intellectuals (Wassily Kandinsky, Erich Gutkind, Frederik van Eden, Martin Buber, Romain Rolland and Upton Sinclair). They were guided by the idea that by gathering European intelligentsia around the goal "Towards the Mankind of the Future through Aryan Europe", they would try to prevent the outbreak of the First World War. In various documents and texts, this group also appeared as *Blue Bund* and *Forte Circle – Forte Kreis*. By the term Aryan, they meant the best of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the European intelligentsia, without the racist connotation characteristic of Nazi ideology. In the spring of 1914, Dimitrije Mitrinović wrote the platform and basic principles of Aryan Europe: "This initiative believes that the future humanity cannot be created by using the blind instincts of history and destiny through world wars being prepared on all sides or in the world's civilization ruled by inhuman relations in laws, industry and economy." However, from today's perspective, after the foundation of the European Union, his vision still seems utopian, because it is based on a humane idea and completely different axiology, but not on political and economic interests.

All his life, Dimitrije Mitrinović remained consistent in his belief in a more humane vision of mankind, refusing to leave our fate to the ruling forces and taking responsibility for changing individuals who together, with genuine respect for their differences, could build a world worthy of man. Only those who have a vision and faith in a better world are truly free. Indeed, we can, with deep conviction, agree with Rigby's statement that, without such a vision, which is given to us by people like Mitrinović, we would lose any sense of how we ought to live.

Bibliography:

- Mihailović, Dragana, Gordana Lazarević, “Stvaralačka kritika Dimitrija Mitrinovića” (Belgrade: Univerzitetska biblioteka “Svetozar Marković” and Službeni Glasnik, 2008).
- Mitrinović, Dimitrije, *Sabrana djela* [Collected Works], vols. 1–3 (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1991).
- Pajin, Dušan, “Nova Evropa i Dimitrije Mitrinović”, *Žlatna Greda*, Vol. 4, Nos. 32/33 (2004).
- Palavestra, Predrag, “Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića” (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977).
- Savić, Obrad, “Mitrinovićevo psihoanalitičko pismo”, *Delo*, Nos. 9/10, (1988).
New Age, 19.08.1920.
New Age, 22.09.1921.
New Britain, 31.05.1933.