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BELLS90 PANEL

BRITISH–SERBIAN CULTURAL TIES REVISITED: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Introductory note

The issue of British–Serbian cultural ties fits logically with the occasion marked by the BELLS90 conference – the 90th anniversary of the English Department at the University of Belgrade. The pertinent contextual connection stems from several factors.

First and foremost, the English Department's founding parents – Prof. Vladeta Popović and Mrs. Mary Stansfield-Popović – personify a British–Serbian cultural and educational encounter that served as a cornerstone in the shaping of English language, literature and culture studies in Serbia and former Yugoslavia.¹ Secondly, the Department cherishes the scholarly legacy of the late Prof. Veselin Kostić, whose extensive research on the history of British–Serbian (and Yugoslav) cultural relations provides a precious basis for further study.² Thirdly, throughout its history, the Department has developed and grown through various forms of British–Serbian

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¹ For summary accounts of the history of the English Department at the University of Belgrade in its various stages, see the following:

- Marković, V. (1969). Četrdeset godina Katedre za engleski jezik i književnost na Univerzitetu u Beogradu. In: *Zbornik radova povodom četrdesetogodišnjice osnivanja Katedre za engleski jezik i književnost*, Beograd: Filološki fakultet, 5–20.

- Stansfield-Popović, M. (1979). I Remember, I Remember.... In: N. Dimitrijević (ed.), *Pedeset godina rada Odseka za anglistiku 1929-1979*, Beograd: Filološki fakultet, 7–10. [Reprinted in K. Rasulić & I. Trbojević (eds.) (2004). *Katedra za anglistiku: 75 godina rada 1929–2004*, Beograd: Filološki fakultet, 25–28].

- Kostić, V. (2006). Spanning 75 Years: The English Department in Belgrade. In: K. Rasulić & I. Trbojević Milošević (eds.), *ELLSII75 Proceedings*, Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 21–25.

- Rasulić, K. (2018). Nine Decades of the English Department at the University of Belgrade. In: S. G. Markovich (ed.), *British-Serbian Relations from the 18th to the 21st Centuries*, Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science/Centre for British Studies and Zepter Book World, 393–404.

² In particular, see the following:

- Костић, В. (1972). *Културне везе између југословенских земаља и Енглеске до 1700. године*. Београд: САНУ.

- Kostić, V. (2014). *Britanija i Srbija: kontakti, veze i odnosi 1700–1860*. Beograd: Arhipelag.

cultural and educational exchange specifically related to its academic staff. On the one hand, a great many of our faculty members, past and present, spent a significant period of postgraduate study in the UK through various scholarship programmes. On the other hand, one of the Department's formative strands, from its very inception, concerns the incorporation of the English language instructors who are native speakers (the so-called 'foreign lectors').³ Given the nature of the Department's foundation, it should come as no surprise that most of our 'foreign lectors' (over 30 of them) have been from Britain – some coming through the British Council exchange in former times, some in other ways; some staying for short periods, but some staying on and sharing their lives with the Department.

Last but not least, the 90th anniversary of the English Department nearly coincided with the 180th anniversary of British–Serbian diplomatic relations (1837–2017). This latter anniversary sparked a renewed interest in the history of British–Serbian relations in various areas – with additional regard to the 2018 centenary of the end of World War 1, which bears special significance to the relations of the two countries. A remarkable result of that renewed interest is the thematic collection of papers *British–Serbian Relations from the 18th to the 21st Centuries*, edited by Slobodan G. Markovich (2018).⁴ In regard to the theme of the present panel, it is worth emphasizing that in this volume, which offers the most comprehensive overview of the field to the present day, it transpires that the most profound and persistent relations are in fact – the cultural ones.

With this background in mind, the present panel is conceived with the aim of highlighting the multifaceted dynamics of building British–Serbian cultural bridges (with a two-way traffic) in a broader socio-cultural context (including diverse areas of cultural interaction, historical and contemporary perspectives, and macro- and micro-level viewpoints). To that aim, the panel brings together four experts from different fields, who actually epitomize British–Serbian cultural ties:

(1) **Slobodan G. Markovich** – Professor of Political Anthropology and Political History of South-East Europe at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade; Research Associate of the London School of Economics / Centre for Research on South Eastern Europe. His books include *British Perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans 1903–1906* (Paris, 2000) and *Chedomille Miyatovich. A Victorian among Serbs* (Belgrade, 2006 /in Serbian/), as well as the edited volume *British–Serbian Relations from the 18th to the 21st Centuries* (Belgrade, 2018). He has been

³ A list of 'foreign lectors' at the English Department in Belgrade up to 2004 is provided in the publication *Katedra za anglistiku: 75 godina rada 1929–2004* (K. Rasulić & I. Trbojević, eds.), Beograd: Filološki fakultet, 2004, 35–37.

⁴ S. G. Markovich (ed.) (2018). *British–Serbian Relations from the 18th to the 21st Centuries*. Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science/Centre for British Studies and Zepter Book World.

Secretary-General of the Anglo-Serbian Society since 1998, and the head of the Centre for British Studies at the Faculty of Political Science since its inception in 2017. In recognition of his efforts to strengthen the relations between Serbia and the United Kingdom, Prof. Markovich received the honorary Membership of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), granted by Queen Elizabeth II.

(2) **Vesna Goldsworthy** – Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Exeter and at the University of East Anglia, and an internationally prize-winning writer and academic. Born in Belgrade and living in London since 1986, she has authored five globally acclaimed books, written in English. Before creative writing, Prof. Goldsworthy taught English literature, whereby her academic specialization is in the late Victorian period. Her study *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (Yale University Press, 1998), which deals with the British perceptions of the Balkans, has been on the reading lists at universities world-wide for over twenty years now. Her further books include: the memoir *Chernobyl Strawberries* (2005), a poetry collection *The Angel of Salonika* (2011), and two novels, *Gorsky* (2015) and *Monsieur Ka* (2018). Her novel *Gorsky* has been translated into 15 languages, and, just like her memoir *Chernobyl Strawberries*, it was also serialized by the BBC Radio 4. With regard to her novel *Monsieur Ka*, the *Daily Mail* noted that “it often takes an émigré to describe a country most clearly, and Goldsworthy, who was born in Belgrade but has lived in London for 30 years, is proving a most accomplished poet of her adopted city”.⁵

(3) **Branko Rosić** – writer/journalist/musician from Belgrade; deputy editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Nedeljnik*. He has authored two acclaimed novels (published in Serbian) – *But It Started So Well* [*A tako je dobro počelo*] (2015) and *For Tomorrow They Announce Eventual Brightening* [*Za sutra najavljuju konačno razvedranje*] (2018), edited the publication *20 years of EXIT activism* (2017), collaborated in the writing of the *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* (2004 /in Serbian/), and published articles in reputable magazines such as *Playboy*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *National Geographic*, etc. He interviewed all the important culture icons from former Yugoslavia, but also many internationally prominent figures from the world of rock and roll, as well as a number of internationally renowned writers. His musical career dates back to the early 1980s (when he played in the punk bands *Urban Guerilla*, *Berliner Strasse*). In 2017, the year marking the 180th anniversary of British-Serbian diplomatic relations, Mr Rosić received the Medal of the British Empire (BEM), granted by Queen Elizabeth II, “for outstanding contribution in promoting and advancing the cultural ties between Great Britain and Serbia”.

⁵ *The Daily Mail Online*, 8 February 2018: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-5368889/LITERARY-FICTION.html>

(4) **Jonathan Pendlebury** – a long-time English language lecturer at the English Department of the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. Having graduated in history from the University of Nottingham in 1997, he arrived in Serbia (as 20-something-year-old) and began his teaching career at the English Department in Belgrade. He received the international Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, and soon after he became a certified examiner within the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Meanwhile, he also received a BA in English Language and Literature from Sinergija University in Bijeljina. Over the years, he has taught learners aged 6 to 66, has had wide experience examining for Cambridge English, and has written a series of textbooks that are used in junior schools in Serbia. He has been involved in several projects with the British Council and within the English Department (including reforming the entrance exam), and has led a number of teacher training workshops for the Serbian Ministry of Education. He is also a proud father of three young Anglo-Serbs.

Specifically, the panelists address the following issues: the British–Serbian cultural links established during the Great War; the changing notions of being a Serbian writer in the United Kingdom; the British–Serbian pop culture encounters in the field of rock music; and the intricate nature of cultural interaction experienced by a British EFL lecturer at the English Department at the University of Belgrade.

On behalf of the English Department in Belgrade, I would like to express sincere gratitude to the British Council and the British Embassy for their support to the BELLS90 Conference – and in particular to this panel. It is to be hoped that this panel will open new perspectives for further development and study of British–Serbian cultural relations.