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WALT WHITMAN VS. KARL MARX – ON WHOSE SIDE IS VASKO POPA?

Abstract: The paper analyzes Vasko Popa's article "On Whose Side is Walt Whitman?" ("Na čijoj je strani Volt Vitmen?", *Književne novine*, 1949) in the context of Whitman's Serbo-Croatian reception and the post-World War II literary and sociopolitical circumstances in Yugoslavia and the United States. Writing in response to Cleveland Rodgers's article "Walt Whitman Vs. Karl Marx" (*New York Herald Tribune*, 1949), Popa here reacts against what he considers the American author's misleading representation of the "good gray poet." Largely inspired by the sociopolitical context, both Rodgers's and Popa's texts are representative of the general climate in the polarized world of the late 1940s. Apart from this, Popa's article deserves attention from the perspective of literary production and reception, as well, being the first text on Whitman in Serbo-Croatian after 1940 and thus symbolically announcing the first book-length Serbo-Croatian translation of Whitman's poetry.

Keywords: literary reception, Yugoslav-American relations, Walt Whitman, Vasko Popa, Cleveland Rodgers, *Književne novine*.

One of the texts that introduced Vasko Popa to the reading audience just before his first poems started to appear was a discussion on the life, work and contemporary significance of Walt Whitman. Published in the Belgrade periodical *Književne novine* (*Literary Newspaper*) in 1949 under a somewhat provocative title "Na čijoj je strani Volt Vitmen?" ("On whose side is Walt Whitman?"), the text responded to a recent article from *New York Herald Tribune* written by Cleveland Rodgers and with an equally eye-catching title "Walt Whitman Vs. Karl Marx." Apart from introducing himself as a literary critic, Popa here re-introduces Whitman to the Yugoslav readers as this is

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the first text on the American poet in Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) since 1940.¹ The fact that Whitman's name re-appears in a polemical context testifies to the complicated cultural and sociopolitical circumstances of the post-World War II times, which provides the framework for the analysis offered in this paper.

The reception of Whitman's work in the Serbo-Croatian cultural space started at the turn of the 20th century and in several instances shows the strong impact not only of the current literary trends, but also of the political developments in the society. The allegiances of the translators, the choice of the poems, the magazines which published these poems, as well as the stance the authors took in their essays on Whitman more often than not reveal the extraliterary movements and attitudes in the society. The translation reception of Whitman's poetry took off after 1909 and especially during 1912 and 1913, when the Young Bosnians, in a surge of cultural activism prompted by the current political events, published their translations in several literary magazines in Sarajevo, most of them in *Bosanska vila*. They were referred to Whitman by Dimitrije Mitrinović, who was himself an ardent Whitmanian admiring the American poet's modern spirit and fresh poetic expression. The Young Bosnians' interest in Whitman is related to their overall wish to instigate changes in the Bosnian society, both political and cultural ones. Similar motives spurred translators and writers later, in the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, so that a number of translations of Whitman's poems as well as essays discussing his work appeared in the interwar period in a variety of newspapers and magazines across the country. We can distinguish two groups of Whitman's admirers: a group of poets and critics who praised Whitman for the modernity of his poetics, considered in line with the avant-garde trends they themselves were trying to promote, and a group that recognized him as a socialist poet, the poet of workers and social justice.² One of the last texts on Whitman in Serbo-Croatian before the outbreak of the Second World War merges these two perspectives – published in the Belgrade weekly *Radničke novine* (*Worker's Paper*), among the news on workers' movements and celebrations of the Storming of the Bastille, this text praises Whitman as the founding father of the American modern poetry (Molek 1939: 4).

¹ This is according to the existing bibliographic accounts; the 1940 text was a translation of Edwin Arlington Robinson's article on four American authors (Franklin, Melville, Poe, and Whitman) (see Babić 1976: 18).

² More on this in: Aćamović 2021.

Vasko Popa's article "On whose side is Walt Whitman?" marks the beginning of a new, post-World War II phase of Whitman's Yugoslav and Serbo-Croatian reception, marked by the emergence of the book-length translations of his poetry. The first of these was Tin Ujević's selection of poems from the final edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published in Zagreb in 1951. Ujević's work on Whitman started well before the war and his translation of Whitman's poetry denotes a continuation of a sustained interest in this poet on the part of the Yugoslav avant-gardists. However, given the considerably changed postwar circumstances, both in Yugoslavia's internal politics and in its relations to other nations, east and west, this continuation was neither smooth nor uninterrupted because some values needed to be re-affirmed and personal preferences to certain foreign authors needed to be justified and clarified. This attempt to re-affirm and clarify the Yugoslav writers' position towards foreign literatures and their representative authors is observable in the articles published in *Književne novine*, as well.

Književne novine, the organ of the Yugoslav Writers' Association, was launched in February 1948, at the time when Yugoslavia was recovering from the world war and was already facing new conflicts ahead. The new polarization of the world, the division between the capitalist West and communist East, the early phases of the Cold War, and finally, the Informbiro Resolution were largely reflected in the tone of the articles published in this periodical. Although primarily concerned with the developments on the literary scene at home and abroad, *Književne novine* also informed their readers on the latest events in other spheres of life. International relations were a particularly sensitive issue and this included the reception of foreign literary works. The newspaper editors paid close attention to the publishing ventures, carefully registering the number and type of books translated from a particular language, and especially scrutinized were the writers from the United States.

Owing to the differences in the two countries' ruling ideologies, in the years 1945–1948 the Yugoslav-American relations reached their historical nadir (Vučetić 2012: 49). Yugoslavia's opposition to the USSR and the Informbiro Resolution of 1948 were significant events indeed, but they did not lead to a sharp turn in the Yugoslav position towards the two powers – some fundamental ideological values of the Soviet Union remained indisputable, whereas America, despite some indications of rapprochement, was still regarded with reservations (Vučetić 2012: 50–51). There were no radical changes in the perception and reception of the Soviet and American

literatures either, as can be inferred from the articles published in *Književne novine*. Among these is the telegram which the Yugoslav Association of Writers send to their Soviet colleagues on the occasion of the 31st anniversary of the October Revolution (Nov. 9, 1948), as well as a report on the Stalin awards for the best literary works in 1948 (Apr. 26, 1949). At the same time, the paper continues to publish censorious articles on the United States, attributing the perceived dismal and corrupted state of the country to the American imperialism and Wall Street capitalism.³

Nevertheless, articles on the American literature often assume a somewhat different tone. While anything related to the American society is sharply criticized as an indicator of America's relentless imperialistic politics and a Wall-Street mindset, the American writers are often distinguished from or even juxtaposed to their country. America is identified with Wall Street, capitalism, and imperialism, while the American writers, poets, and other intellectuals are perceived as bright spots that should be defended from the system within which they live and work. Certain authors were particularly singled out as those that should not be confused with the prevailing American value system. In his article "Američka satira na preživjele institucije" ("American satire on the surviving institutions"), Mladen Leskovac writes: "Out of the few American 19th-century authors, only two of them truly crossed the boundaries of the American significance: Walt Whitman and Mark Twain" (Leskovac 1948: 4).⁴ The articles on the American authors which were published in *Književne novine* in 1948 and 1949 aimed either to prove these authors' international significance or their anti-imperialism and disagreement with the US political establishment.

Such attitude is considerably different from the one of some thirty years before, when, in the aftermath of the First World War, being American invariably meant being modern, progressive and cosmopolitan. This can be inferred from the way Walt Whitman was presented to the Yugoslav interwar audience, a paradigmatic example being Anica Savić-Rebac's essay

³ This was a trend observable from the beginning. In one of the first issues of the periodical, John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* received quite a negative review from E. F. (most likely Eli Finci), who describes it as an "unsightly work" (E. F. 1948,). In a similar manner, discussing the Hollywood industry, Aleksandar Vučo warns of the American "monopolist capital," which aims to "turn the film into a direct weapon of the imperialistic politics" and achieve the "absolute domination of the American film on the cinema screens worldwide". (Vučo 1948:)

⁴ The translations of the texts originally in Serbian is provided by the author of the paper.

“Stogodišnjica Walta Whitmana” (“Walt Whitman’s Centennial”, *Književni jug*, 1919). While writing about Whitman as a representative of the American democracy, the Serbian author touches on the current geopolitical affairs and mentions the American president Woodrow Wilson and his efforts to promote peace in the war-torn Europe. Contrary to this essay, in which Whitman’s Americanness was presented as a positive feature, Popa’s 1949 article aims to prove that Whitman actually stands apart from America, that is, from the current America. In a socialist country like Yugoslavia, Whitman’s Americanness could be considered a negative trait, especially since there were authors (like Cleveland Rodgers) who portrayed him as an exponent of distinctly American values. Popa’s text could thus be read as an endeavor to defend a beloved American poet from any attempts of identifying him with capitalism and imperialism.

Popa’s quite emotional response was provoked by the polemical context in which the *New York Herald Tribune* article placed Whitman, which is suggested by the very title “Walt Whitman Vs. Karl Marx.” The subheading points to the occasion which motivated Cleveland Rodgers to write this article – “Anniversary prompts a re-examination of two extraordinary careers.” Given that the publication date is May 30, 1949, the said anniversary should refer to 130 years since Whitman’s birth (May 31, 1819), but the first sentences reveal the author had another anniversary in mind, or rather two of them: “Nineteen forty-nine is the centennial, not only of Whitman’s Year of Decision but of Karl Marx’s trial for high treason and his expulsion from Prussia” (Rodgers 1949: 10). As stated later on, the “Year of Decision” refers to Whitman’s withdrawing from a direct political engagement after the presidential election of 1948, his disappointment with the course of action taken by the periodical he worked for (*Freeman*), and his general “disillusionment with politics as an effective method of bringing about the millennium in human affairs” (Rodgers 1949: 10).⁵ Whitman is here seen primarily as a political thinker, not a poet, and as such contrasted to a philosopher whose theories were gaining ground worldwide, including some circles in the United States. While the anniversaries were the immediate occasion, the deeper motive for the examination (or “re-examination”) of Whitman’s and Marx’s careers lay in the current geopolitical affairs – the

⁵ Although Whitman withdraw from the *Freeman* and ended his activities as the party man, this „did not mean he had lost his interest in politics“ (Idzerda 1956: 178). In this sense, 1849 is not much of a turning point, but is certainly significant.

ever increasing tension between the American democracy and the Soviet communism, two rivaling systems these authors were seen to represent.

The author of the article, Cleveland Rodgers, was an editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the newspaper Walt Whitman himself edited from 1846 to 1848, and also a New York City Planning Commissioner. Apart from this (or perhaps, owing to this, considering Whitman's devotion to both New York and journalism as a profession), Rodgers was a dedicated Whitman enthusiast, who in 1920, along with John Black, edited a two-volume collection of Whitman's essays and articles titled *The Gathering of the Forces*, for which he also wrote an introduction. The newspaper that published his article on Whitman and Marx, the *New York Herald Tribune*, was one of the leading American dailies at the time (Kluger 1986: 406) and also one with a long history of anti-communist preferences, largely dictated by the need to cater to the business-oriented Republican readership. Therefore, "with democracy and communism desperately grappling for world predominance," as Rodgers states at the beginning of his article, publishing a text which would confirm American predominance and celebrate democracy and its most prominent poet seemed quite proper. Although the postwar America is commonly perceived as a decisively and uniformly capitalist country, the socialist forces (especially those in the American intellectual circles) were not to be disregarded.

However, despite the context his article appeared in, Cleveland Rodgers seems to have been eager to provide an unbiased, objective comparison of Whitman and Marx. His approach is comparative and biographical, so that he alternately presents facts from Marx's and Whitman's lives, writing about their education, religious backgrounds, their job posts, and finally their political activity, with the year 1849 as a turning point for both of them. Rodgers sees both *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and *Das Kapital* (1867) as "ideological works [that] grew out of the reactions of their authors to significant political developments in 1848 and 1849" (Rodgers 1949: 10). Although he portrays them as the representatives of rivaling ideologies, Rodgers also points to the similarities between Whitman and Marx: that they were similarly influenced by the mid-19th-century sociopolitical context, that they both published articles in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* (the predecessor of the present *New York Herald Tribune*), and in more general terms, that "both were idealists and philosophers and professed the same ultimate objectives of wiping out class distinctions, special privilege and the exploitation of man by man" (10). The article recognizes Whitman's class concerns as well as

the poet's denunciation of injustice towards workers, the poor, women, his support of the emancipation of the downtrodden and particular abhorrence towards slavery. But at the same time, Rodgers is careful not to bring this in any connection with the socialist thought and insists that, despite some common worldviews of the two authors, Whitman's and Marx's "methods proposed for perfecting society" were very much different.

In an attempt to offer a balanced view of the two juxtaposed figures, Rodgers attempts to do justice to Marx's theory and legacy. However, the article does not offer anything close to a nuanced analysis so that both Marx's and Whitman's political ideas are presented in a rather simplified form. Marx's "basic doctrine" is thus summarized in a few lines – "that the forces of production are always controlled by a class; that no class can rule without bringing an antagonistic class into play, and that the class controlling the forces of production must be opposed by the workers" (10). Rodgers adds that Marx envisioned "his kind of socialism" to be universal and that this aiming for a worldwide reach is what causes the present friction between "Soviet Russia and the Democratic world." Whitman's "doctrine" contains a similar claim for universality, but in Rodgers's article this is expressed in different terms: "Instead of class war as a prelude to the onward march of civilization, [Whitman] was for getting down all the barriers that separate nation from nation and man for man" (10). Whitman's approach is therefore presented as more pacifist although it too envisions the world governed by one system – American democracy. As the final point in the article, the leading role of America is underlined by the quote from one of Whitman's newspaper articles in which the poet proclaims that the liberty of the masses of the downtrodden Europe is to be achieved "through the people territory and government of the United States," the alternative to which being quite dismal – "If it should fail! O dark were the hour and dreary beyond description the horror of such a failure" (10).⁶

What Rodgers fails to convey in his text, for all his attempts at an objective presentation, is that Whitman's faith in America reaching the democratic ideal he envisioned for it was far from unwavering. Two concepts that Rodgers sharply contrasts, individual freedom (represented by Whitman) vs. class struggle (represented by Marx), are not that decisively

⁶ The article was published in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on November 24, 1846, entitled "American Futurity." It is also among those collected and republished in *The Gathering of the Forces* (see Whitman 1920: 27–28).

separated in Whitman's thinking. The poet was concerned both with man as a free individual and man as a part of a community, and especially focused on the place of workers and artisans in the increasingly industrialized society. The issue of the individual and the masses, "the conflict at the foundation of the American republic: how to reconcile the desire for personal liberty with the demands of social union" (Erkkilä 1996: 254) was a troubling one for the poet. Apart from the events of 1848 and 1849 that Rodgers emphasizes, some others were equally if not even more important for Whitman's perception of his present – the American Civil War and its aftermath, the Reconstruction period, posed new questions related to the abovementioned reconciliation. It seems that Whitman did not manage to find one definitive answer, not even in his major treatise on democracy – "his [*Democratic*] *Vistas* conclude with a series of contradictions that await some higher synthesis in the future" (Erkkilä 1996: 256). Perhaps intentionally so, judging by Whitman's remark after receiving a visit from a young Russian anarchist: "Everybody comes here demanding endorsements: endorse this, endorse that: each man thinks I am radical his way: I suppose I am radical his way, but I am not radical his way alone" (Traubel 1906: 65).

As in his presentation of Marx's thought, Rodgers is not particularly thorough in examining Whitman's political ideas, focusing on the poet's frequent and indeed persistent appeals for democracy and without delving into what exactly "democracy" meant for Whitman and to what extent the poet considered it realized in the then America. Whitman's preoccupation with working classes is mentioned but its socialist connotations are largely disregarded. Rodgers never acknowledges the fact that Whitman was one of the inspirational figures for socialist movements around the world,⁷ the fact that could hardly have been unfamiliar to him. The American socialists of his time too had been relying on Whitman's ideas and the poet came to be one of the pillars of the American Left.⁸ Finally, Rodgers's image of America

⁷ Socialists across Europe at the turn of the century adopted Whitman as their poet and one of the more striking examples is his reception by those in the United Kingdom. Examining Whitman's presence in the British socialist periodicals, Kirsten Harris notes the significance not only of printing Whitman's poetry but also of merely mentioning his name in the context of socialism: "His 'message' was brought to people who might not otherwise read his poetry, and if he was used to illustrate or teach about socialism, conversely these publications were also used to further his reputation" (Harris 2013: 118-119). The benefit was twofold.

⁸ In the first chapter of his study *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, Richard Rorty goes back to Whitman to show how his image of America

as the land of democracy seems somewhat incomplete, as Rodgers does not pass any comment on the other major governing force in his country – capitalism.

This final point was what most triggered Vasko Popa's heated response to Rodgers's article. At the very beginning, Popa points to the consumerist environment in which the *New York Herald Tribune* text appeared – “in-between two colorful columns of ads for radio sets, nylons, chewing gums, and Ford automobiles” (Popa 1949: 3). The main objection of the Serbian author is directed to the context in which Walt Whitman, “one of the greatest American poets,” is placed and which, in Popa's opinion, is entirely emblematic of everything that is unsettling in the present America. Starting from the title, which he deems “sensationalist [...] as if it were about a box match,” and the author, whom he characterizes as “imperialistic,” Popa disparages the article as a false and distorted presentation of the “good gray poet's”⁹ life and poetry, according to which the poet of democracy comes across as a representative of an American way of life and Wall Street worldviews. Using the vocabulary that seems to be typical of both the political and literary articles of the then socialist periodicals, Popa speaks of the “reactionary literary history” trying to “take Whitman away from his nation” and use him for its “anti-national aims.” Such tone was generally adopted in handling the American topics – the Yugoslav authors aimed to separate American writers from the American politics and system of values, which they found imperialistic, capitalist, and quite deplorable.

After the introduction which leaves no doubt about Vasko Popa's opinion on American journalists, the Serbian author presents his view of Walt Whitman. The main difference between Rodgers's and Popa's approaches lies in the fact that the latter views Whitman as a poet, not a political thinker or journalist. To be more precise, Popa, himself a poet (albeit still unpublished), unlike Rodgers, a journalist and civil servant, focuses on Whitman's poetry and not his political activism, although he does mention Whitman's public service, as well. Similar to some earlier accounts on Whitman published in Yugoslav periodicals,¹⁰ Popa's article offers an

as a land of not yet realized but promised democracy had a considerable impact on the American Left (See Rorty 1998).

⁹ The phrase is William Douglas O'Connor's, first used in the title of his essay on Whitman and ever since widely accepted by Whitman's followers.

¹⁰ See for instance the essays written by Ivo Andrić and Anica Savić-Rebac, published on the occasion of Whitman's centennial in *Književni jug*, 1919.

overview of Whitman's life, from his Long Island childhood, to his various employments in printers' shops, schools, lawyers' offices, and newspapers, his life-changing trip to New Orleans and involvement in the Civil War, to his funeral in 1892, at which "there were no priests chanting," only his friends reading his lines. The central part of the article focuses on Whitman's poetry, on what it meant at the time when it appeared and how it changed the existing poetic discourse. Popa pays particular attention to Whitman's poetic breakthrough, the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855 by the poet himself (since no publisher was interested in such enterprise) as an embodiment of his long-standing wish to sing the poem of America. The numerous negative reviews are also mentioned, including the one from the London *Critic*, deeming Whitman "as unacquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics" ([*Critic*] 1856). Popa observes that Whitman's „book of verses“ offers an image of the US as „a young democracy“ of the 1850s and 1860s, the land still free of sharp „class differences, which would turn it into an empire of banks, billionaires and trusts, the oppressors of millions of the proletarian masses“ (Popa 1949: 3). Apart from Whitman's "I," representing different people from all over the States, as a token of the Whitmanian love for the mankind, the article points to the poet's love for other nations, "and especially for their freedom movements" – the love which inspired poems celebrating the 19th-century revolutions in different European countries. Whitman is also portrayed as the poet of science and exploration, singing hymns honoring human thought, as the poet of the machines, trains, hospitals, that is of technological development, as well as the founder of urban poetry, who inspired a whole range of American and European poets. In addition to all this, Popa draws attention to Whitman's innovative poetic form, his rejection of literary conventions and adoption of free verse as the only means for encompassing and expressing "the vast opulence of new untouched topics, pumped up from the well of the folk life" (Popa 1949: 3). The Civil War is presented as one of the central events, which also shaped *Leaves of Grass* – apart from "O Captain! My Captain!", Popa interestingly (and somewhat erroneously) points to the "Song of Myself" as a poem containing "highly artistic document on the American Civil War".¹¹

¹¹ While *Leaves of Grass* as a collection considerably changed after and as a result of the Civil War, we cannot say the same for "Song of Myself," which first appeared in 1855 and which indeed underwent changes in the subsequent editions, but not to the extent that it could be considered profoundly affected by this war. It is unclear whether Popa wanted to mention another poem or if this is actually the way he read and understood it.

Reading Popa's overview of Whitman's work and his comments on the *New York Herald Tribune* article, we can observe that the Serbian author makes a clear distinction between two Americas: the America of the late 1940s, a capitalist and decisively anti-socialist country, and the America of Whitman's time, or more precisely, Whitman's America, those aspects of his country which the poet praised most and would gladly see spread worldwide so that everyone could benefit from them. It is questionable whether this second America ever existed. But that certainly was the picture of the New World that was Whitman's ideal, as well as the ideal which many of the European poets looked up to. As for the America as the leader of the capitalist West, Popa was clearly repulsed by the fact that Whitman could be identified with it, which can be seen from the strong language at the end of the article. As the Serbian poet sees it, Cleveland Rodgers is just one of the "tens of literary historians" who brazenly strived to "disfigure" Whitman and "butcher" his work so that it would serve their purposes. Rodgers, according to Popa, maliciously tried to identify "the democratic United States of America of Whitman's time with today's America" and thus present Whitman as "a poet of American imperialistic dreams." The aim of this and similar frauds of the "reactionary literary historians" was to "disarm the poet's battle verses," that is, the revolutionary potential of Whitman's poetry. "The good gray poet's" words on man's dignity, on the equality of men and nations, on the advancement of the mankind and the world peace should certainly lead to the victory of the working people. Popa finds this confirmed in the fact that the "soldiers of the first victorious socialist revolution of 1917 sang Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!"

Vasko Popa himself was not a poet of socialist revolution. Although he started publishing his essays and poetry in an environment heavily charged with ideological discourse, his own poetic work does not address the struggle of the working class, but leans on the Serbian folklore and the poetry of European surrealists. Upon its appearance in 1953, *Kora*, his first poetry collection, was perceived a sign of resistance to the accepted aesthetics of social realism and received rather negative reviews (Novaković 1997: 59). Nevertheless, the late 1940s and early 1950s were the years when "all human activity [was] being concentrated either into European-American or into Russian Bolshevik patterns" (Auerbach 1969: 3) so that choosing sides was an expected thing to do. With the rhetoric used to describe Rodgers's article and the stock phrases from the contemporary Marxist-socialist discourse, Popa conforms to the standard of writing for *Književne novine*; however, the

language becomes considerably more measured when he turns to discussing Whitman. Popa is not trying to present Whitman as a socialist poet, but rather as a poet whose work is timeless and universal, as the means for fighting the injustices and inequalities. Citing the lines from Section 33 of “Song of Myself,” the lines narrating the plights of the hounded slave chased and bitten by the dogs and beaten by the horse-riders, Popa makes his final point – that Walt Whitman is and has always been unambiguously on the side of the downtrodden, on the side of the progressive mankind, implying that he could never be brought in connection with today’s American capitalists.

To conclude returning to the question from the title of this text, in his presentation or rather defense of Walt Whitman’s work and legacy, Vasko Popa clearly indicated on whose side he himself is *not* – Popa is not on the side of the “imperialists” who are trying to misrepresent “the good gray poet” so that his ideas could serve their purposes only and by implication lose any relevance for those on the other end of the ideological spectrum. Sharp criticism levelled at the author of the American article was meant to draw a clear line between the present America and Whitman’s America, as an ideal of democracy. The focus of the young Serbian poet’s analysis is Walt Whitman, the founder of modern poetry and champion of the oppressed, the American bard, whose legacy must not be shoved into any political agenda but always considered in its eternal call for the international brotherhood of all nations. Such was the Whitman embraced in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and as such he should be embraced in the new socialist country.

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Bojana Aćamović

VOLT VITMAN VS. KARL MARKS – NA ČIJOJ JE STRANI VASKO POPA?

Rezime: Tekst Vaska Pope „Na čijoj je strani Volt Vitmen”, objavljen u *Književnim novinama* oktobra 1949. godine, značajan je kako u kontekstu posleratne recepcije Vitmanovog stvaralaštva na srpsko-hrvatskom govornom području, tako i u odnosu na složene društveno-poli-

tičke prilike u Jugoslaviji i Sjedinjenim Državama, koje su se u velikoj meri odražavale i na planu književne produkcije i recepcije. Popa ovde odgovara na članak američkog publiciste Klivlenda Rodžersa, koji je nekoliko meseci ranije objavljen u *Njujork herald tribjunu* pod naslovom „Volt Vitman vs. Karl Marks”. Polemički kontekst u koji američki autor postavlja Vitmanovo delo naveo je Popu da oštro reaguje protiv „falsifikovanja” biografije „dobrog, sedog pesnika” i „izopačavanja” smisla njegove poezije. I Rodžersov i Popin tekst u velikoj meri donose više od ličnih stavova ova dva autora u pogledu Vitmanovog dela – svojom retorikom i usmeravanjem pažnje na određene aspekte Vitmanove poezije oni su odraz opšte klime u književnosti i društvu s kraja četrdesetih godina prošlog veka.

Ključne reči: književna recepcija, jugoslovensko-američki odnosi, Volt Vitman, Vasko Popa, Klivlend Rodžers, *Književne novine*.