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THE RECEPTION OF VUK ST. KARADŽIĆ'S WORK IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AREA

Abstract: Lach Szyrma, a writer of Polish descent, was the first one to translate our folk song into English (1821). In his paper *Popular Poetry of Serbia* (*Westminster Review*, 1826), John Browning published the English translation of several Serbian folk songs. A year later, he published the book of these translations (*Servian Popular Poetry*, 1827). John Gibson Lockhart translated and published Serbian poems (in the journal *The Quarterly Review*, 1827). Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, under the pseudonym of Owen Meredith, published the book, *Serbski Pesme or National Songs of Serbia* (Chapman and Hall, London, 1861) and the translation was done by A. Dozon (the second edition in 1869; the third edition in 1917). Kate Freiligrath Kroeker translated a handful of songs taken from Talvj's collection (*Marko Kraljevitch: the mythic hero of Servia* in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1877).

Keywords: Vuk St. Karadžić, John Bowring, reception, oral literature, translation.

Lach Szyrma, a writer of Polish descent, was the first one to translate our folk song into English (1821). In his paper *Popular Poetry of Serbia* (*Westminster Review*, 1826), John Browning published the English translation of several Serbian folk songs. A year later, he published the book of these translations (*Servian Popular Poetry*, 1827). John Gibson Lockhart translated and published Serbian poems (in the journal *The Quarterly Review*, 1827). Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, under the pseudonym of Owen Meredith, published the book, *Serbski Pesme or National Songs of Serbia* (Chapman and Hall, London, 1861) and the translation was done by A. Dozon (the second

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edition in 1869; the third edition in 1917). Kate Freiligrath Kroeker translated a handful of songs taken from Talvj's collection (*Marko Kraljevič: the mythic hero of Servia* in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1877). A handful of Muslim folk poems was translated into English and published in J. de Asbóth's book *An official tour through Bosnia and Herzegovina* in 1890. Apart from these, our folk songs were translated into English by the following: Elodie Lewton Mijatović (*Kosovo*, London, 1881), E. W. Seton-Watson (*Serbian Ballads*, London, 1916), M. A. Mügge (*Serbian Folk Songs, Fairy Tales and Proverbs*, London, 1916), J. W. Wiles (*Serbian Songs and Poems*, London, 1917), Helen Rotham (*Kosovo*, Oxford, 1920), D. H. Low (*The Ballads of Marko Kraljevič*, Cambridge, 1922). Our folk songs were translated in America, too, by: George Rappall Noyes and Leonard Bacon (*The Heroic Ballads of Servia*, Boston, 1913), R. W. Seton-Watson (*Serbian Ballads*, London, 1916), James W. Wiles, (*Serbian Songs and Poems*, London, 1917), Clarence A. Manning and O. Muiriel Fuller (*Marko the King's Son, Hero of the Serbs*, New-York, 1932), Anne Pennington, Peter Levi (*Marko the Prince – Serbo-Croat-Heroic-Songs*, New York, 1984), (see Pešić 1965: 208–210; Suvajdžić 2016: 19–20).

One of the first translators of Serbian folk songs into English, John Bowring – merchant, political editor of the *Westminster Review*, diplomat and member of the Royal Academy, polyglot, translator of Spanish and Russian folk poetry – translated Serbian folk songs from German translations (translated into German by Talvj in 1825 and in 1826):

Bowring was a respectable haberdasher, a political editor of the *Westminster Review*, a diplomat, a member of the Royal Academy and a polyglot. He translated Spanish and Russian folk songs and his main hobby was “studying foreign languages and literatures.” In his introduction he pointed out that his main objective was that his translation “has the merit of perfect fidelity to the character of an original” although he had done his translations in fact almost entirely from the German version of these songs published by ‘Talgj’ [this pseudonym was formed from the initial letters of her name, Therese Albertine Luise von Jacob] in the first edition of her translations of our folk songs in 1825 and 1826. In that introduction he made a casual remark that ‘Talgj’ was “an amiable woman” who, “having passed the earlier part of her life in Russia, and possessing a mind cultivated by literature and captivated by the natural beauties of Servian poetry, has most successfully devoted herself to their diffusion.” At the end of the introduction he also casually remarked that he had employed the notes attached to ‘Talgj’s’ translation “without any special reference to them.” But, he failed to acknowledge publicly the extent of his debt to ‘Talgj’s’ translations and she “cherished a certain resentment against the author”.⁶ In the February of 1828, she called him “a literary dandy”, adding that she considered it funny this mania of his to be “universal” not only in Slavic studies, but in anything foreign”, hinting at “his superficial knowledge of languages” (Koljević 2015: 269–279).

Dragutin Subotić particularly wrote about the resentment Talvj felt because of the dishonesty of Bauring's translation.¹ The 1830's correspondence between Vuk Karadžić and John Bowring – written in French and Russian, in which Vuk tries to have his translation of the *New Testament* published by the London Bible Society with the help of a respected translator of Serbian folk songs into English – has been preserved.² This attempt ended in failure, but the correspondence is very interesting from a cultural and historical point of view (See Suvajdžić 2016: 183–184):

JOHN BOWRING – VUK KARADŽIĆ,
LONDON FEBRUARY 15, 1829

Londres ce 15 Fev 1829.

C'est avec une extrême impatience que j'ai attendu le MS. dont votre honorée du 17/29 Septe m'entretient.

Je n'ai rien reçu – et j'en suis extrêmement fâché – car il se passe le moment intéressant et que je trouve sans pouvoir faire ce que j'aurais surtout désiré.

Mais veuillez – veuillez me donner de vos nouvelles et agréer l'assurance de mon amitié constante

John Bowring.

АКАДУ, 3839. *Вукова преписка V*, 475.

¹ See D. Subotić, "Yugoslav Traditional Poetry in English Literature", *Yugoslav Popular Ballads*, Cambridge at the University Press, Cambridge, 1932, p. 230, even earlier, Dragutin Subotić expressed this view in other words – see "Srpske narodne pesme u engleskoj književnosti [Serbian Folk Songs in English Literature]", *the Anniversary of Nikola Čupić*, Book XXXVII, the publication of the Foundation of Nikola Čupić, Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, Belgrade, 1928, p. 34.

² See Lj. Stojanović, *The Life and Work of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić*, Second (phototype) edition, Belgrade: BIGZ, 1987, 612–618.

VUK KARADŽIĆ – JOHN BOWRING,
VIENNA, MARCH 5, 1829

Въна 5. Марта по Римскому. 829.

М. Г. И. Карловичъ!

Прежде нѣсколько днѣй я пріѣхалъ изъ Сербіи обратно въ Вѣну. Въ бытность мою въ Сербіи чрезъ Сербскаго агента изъ Константинополя писалъ Кн. М. Обреновичу какой то членъ Лон дон скаго Библейскаго общества (вѣроятно Г. Ливесъ) о цевеводѣ Н. З. на Сербскій языкъ. И я твердо надѣюсь жалаемому [!] рѣшенію. – Я надѣюсь опять быть въ Сербіи откуда можетъ быть возмогу сообщить Вамъ что нибудь извѣстнѣе въ прирѣнни сего дѣла. Между тѣмъ прошу Васъ покорнѣйше принять мою чувствителнѣйшую благодарность за Ваше стараніе; ибо я знаю, что и сіе писалъ Г. Ливесъ по вашему представленію.

Естьли бы Вы между тѣмъ благоизволили удостоить каковаго извѣстія Вашей стороны, то прошу отправить оное только Г. Копытарю который кланяется Вамъ учтивѣйше. Онъ говоритъ, что писалъ Вамъ два письма и надѣется, что Вы ихъ получили. Не знаю слышали ли Вы, что Добровскій умеръ?

Измежду прочихъ причинъ, для чего Вы не получили изъ Сербіи отвѣта на письмо Ваше, сія есть важнѣйшая что они письма Вашего *не разумѣли*. Въ Сербіи еще нѣтъ чловѣка, знающаго по Аглички! Того ради, я прошу Васъ М. Г. извините сія грубость. С. М. письменно просиль меня изъ Черной Горы, благодарить Васъ за посланную книгу.

Концепт. АСАНУ, 3840. *Вукова прейиска V, 476.*

The next scholarly vogue for Serbian (epic) folk poetry in Europe coincided with a renewed interest in the so-called “Homeric Question” and the question of the birth of an epic, from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to this very day. In science, the Homeric Question refers to the dilemma whether the *Iliad* is the work of one poet or whether it is a product of oral-formulaic composition, consisting of various poems in ancient Greek. There are two possible lines to follow in an attempt to answer this question: some researchers think that the *Iliad* is a concatenation of poems that were mechanically joined together and in this epic poem, they trace some inconsistencies and mistakes which, according to them, disprove the theory that one authentic and brilliant poet gave an overall picture of the Trojan War. The Unitarians,

on the other hand, find in the structure and composition of this epic poem arguments that undoubtedly support the theory that one brilliant poet, that the Greeks named Homer, composed this epic poem.

Matija Murko had a major influence on Milman Parry, a young Homerologist from Harvard, and on Albert Bates Lord, his assistant, when they referred to Serbian and Balkan epic poetry in an attempt to answer the Homeric Question. Consequently, their research was published in the book *The Singer of Tales* written by A. Lord which prompted the members of the educated public of both Europe and the world to research scientifically the epic poetry of the South Slavs. Marshall McLuhan included the results of Lord's research in his major work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (See Suvajdžić 2016: 22).

Vuk, in a peculiar way, presented the Serbian people as "literary" people and introduced them to European literature, at the same time, preserving their identity and insisting on the terms: "folk" and "Serbian" (See Suvajdžić 2016: 23).³

One of the first studies that dealt with English translations of Serbo-Croatian literature was D. H. Low's study "The First Link between English and Serbo-Croat Literature" (*The Slavonic Review*, vol. 3, no. 8, 1924, pp. 363–369). It emphasizes Fortis' recording of "Hasanaginica" and its translation by Walter Scott as the first point of contact between Serbian oral poetry and the English literary public:

Scott's version is only a translation of a translation of a translation, and it would be but a sorry task to compare this wishy-washy verbosity with the spare, lean virility of

³ "His entire work was defined by the terms "popular" and "Serbian" or more precisely by the phrase "Serbian popular". Highlighted in the title of his major works, these terms refer to the most important things that define these books as literary works, from their topics to their literary forms and style. In his time and in his interpretation, these terms referred only to common people, to 'peasants and labourers' who, according to Vuk, were the 'essence' of our nation. Thus, he discovered the sources that had been available to everyone and yet nobody had made use of them. In all the earlier epochs of Serbian literature, from its beginnings, ever since the Serbs had accepted the Slavic language, during the entire Middle Ages, under Turkish rule, in the 18th century (with the exception of Venclović and Dositej), in fact, until the moment when Vuk appeared on the literary scene, literature and books had not reached common people as such. Vuk's work, just like all the other major creations of the human spirit, was the result of *his* development as a *gradual ripening* which had not taken place within literature itself, but what was more important, it had taken place outside literature in the depths of the language that was alive and in the depths of the collective consciousness. (Deretić 2002: 570)

the Serbian – or even of the German. We must remember, however, that our young translator who habitually “over-estimated all talents save his own” was at the moment suffering very badly from the incredibly pernicious influence of Lewis. So much so that the preposterous “Monk” might almost have made the translation himself. Yet the “Morlachian Fragment,” crude, feeble, and emasculate as it is, marks the first recorded appearance in English of the poetry of the Serbs, and forms thus a literary link not without an interest and an importance of its own (Low 1924: 363–369).

The functions of the epic formula and some characteristics of oral traditional poetics were especially investigated by Albert B. Lord:

It is my hope that my remarks may help to heighten other scholars’ awareness that many of the published texts that we have are not adequate for a true analysis of oral-traditional style, because very often they have been changed in the direction of written non-traditional style, and do not represent the singer’s text. I would also hope that what I have said may stimulate others to look more closely at the distinctive poetics of oral-traditional epic performance. Yet a note of caution may also be in order. In the search for the fine points of traditional poetics there is a real danger that one may go too far and see things in the text that are not there. If due consideration is given to the constraints of performance and of tradition, our vision of oral-traditional poetics will surely bear the stamp of truth (Lord 1988: 21–28.)

John S. Miletić writes on the distinctions between oral and written style, especially with reference to the concept and function of popular literature:

A curious feature of one form of *pučka književnost*, the quasi-folk style poem, is its potential to be folklorized, or to take on the features of the folk style, after it has entered the tradition of folk singing. This phenomenon has been noted in the case of some of Kačić Miošić’s imitations and has been proposed in the case of a *bugarštica* and some of the authentic folk songs in Kurelac’s collection.¹ What is especially interesting about the folk songs in question collected by Kurelac is the mutual interaction of the folk and the quasi-folk poetic traditions, and the degree to which the quasi-folk style came in turn to influence and shape the folk-song tradition which inspired it (for details, see n. 4 above). Jovan Deretić calls attention to the partial folklorization of songs in Vuk Stefanović Karadžić’s fourth volume of the Vienna edition (1862) which the Montenegrin Bishop Petar I wrote and which later underwent some folklorization in the folk-song tradition; Deretić notes that these songs are on the border of folk and learned literatures. They seem to me to belong to a specific sub-type in Bošković-Stulli’s system of *pučka književnost*, that is, to a sub-category of the quasi-folk style group; unlike Kačić Miošić’s imitations, they are much closer to the folk style than to the learned since they are on the very edge of the folk style because of their partial folklorization (Miletich 1988: 99–106).

In a series of studies, Mirjana Detelić talks about the limitations of Peri-Lord’s formula theory when it comes to the material on which the theoretical conclusions were drawn (Detelic 2002; 2006). In a series of

studies, articles and essays, academician prof. dr Nada Milošević-Đorđević has presented the poetics of Serbian oral tradition, with an emphasis on the English translation of Vuk Karadžić's opus:⁴

Vuk Karadžić's poetics reflects his active attitude to the whole national, social, moral and artistic apparatus of Serbian oral culture. He understood this apparatus thoroughly and presented it to the world in his own way. His poetics of tradition involves, above all, a language which represents 'the sacred soul of the nation', a language which writers and educators must take into account, as the people create words and compose for general use and to communicate ideas. This is the language of a 'finished' folk literature, which Karadžić takes as the basis of the literary language, and which is the basis of contemporary literary activity. But this poetics is built on a broad view of the life, customs, beliefs and history of a people vividly preserved in oral literature (Milošević-Đorđević 1994: 52–67).

Professor Nada Milošević-Đorđević introduced our scientific public to the importance of the works of American folklorists John Miles Foley, Milman Parry and Albert Lord. She also wrote about translations and anthologies of our folk literature in the English-speaking world.⁵ Prof. Snežana Samardžija also devoted particular attention in her research to Vuk's poetics in the context of his entire work:

Never before, or, indeed after Karadžić, has the task of collecting folk songs been approached so systematically, with such perseverance and care. Owing to his scrupulous selection of the material, which he recorded or received from his collaborators, he managed to publish the finest folk poems composed by his people. The four-volume edition of *Serbian Folk Songs (Srpske narodne pjesme)* first appeared in Leipzig (Vols. II and III, in 1823, Vol. I, in 1824; Vol. IV was published in Vienna, in 1833). The four volumes of the definite, slightly revised, edition, known as the Viennese edition, were successively published in 1841, 1845, 1846, 1862, and later reprinted several times (Samardžija 2011: 7–22).

⁴ The Poetics of the Serbian Oral Tradition of Vuk Karadžić / N. Milošević-Đorđević // The uses of tradition a comparative inquiry into the nature, uses and functions of oral poetry in the Balkans, the Baltic, and Africa. London: University of London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies; Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1994. pp. 51–73; The Oral Tradition / N. Milošević-Đorđević // The history of Serbian culture; [translated by Randall A. Major]. – Edgware: Porthill, 1995. pp. 147–163. (English translation of the book: *Istorija srpske kulture*, 1994. Other editions: [2nd ed., English ed.]. – Belgrade : Mrlješ : Verzal press, 1999. – 2nd ed. – Edgware : Porthill Publishers, 1999).

⁵ The Serbian Epic Ballads: an anthology / translated into English verse by Geoffrey N. W. Locke; [foreword by N. Milošević-Đorđević]. – [1st ed.]. – Belgrade: Nolit, 1997 – 436 pages. (Other editions: – Belgrade: Tanesi, 2011 – 401 p., [24] p. with plates: illustrations; 20 x 26 cm).

Prof. Samardžija also referred to the reception of our oral literature in Europe in the 19th and the 20th century:

[...] In the same year when Mérimée published his famous mystification of the so-called “Illyrian” poetry (in fact, Serbian folk songs), *La Guzla* (1827), J. Bowring published his translations and announced his intention to translate all the poems of Karadžić’s two collections. With the help of S. Milutinović, W. Gerhard published two volumes of his translations of Serbian folk songs in 1828. Goethe wrote approvingly about this work and praised the cultural mission of his compatriots. Finnish translator Jochan Runneberg based his translations into Swedish (1830) on T. A. L. von Jacob – Talvi’s translations. In the second half of the 19th century two books of translations by O. Dawson appeared in 1859 and in 1888 respectively. A collection of translations into Russian by M. Stavritsky was published in 1876. Russian translators also included Vostokov, Sreznevsky and Pushkin. L. Leger edited a small collection of songs about Marko Kraljević in 1906. The fame of this poetry also spread across the Atlantic Ocean. Professor of Slavonic Languages at the University of California J. N. Rappel and L. Bacon published a voluminous collection of Serbian folk songs in Boston, in 1913. (Samardžija 2011: 7–22)

A cordial monograph on Vuk’s life and work was written by Duncan Wilson, British ambassador to Yugoslavia since 1964, and a great friend of our country. He particularly emphasized the importance of friendship and cooperation between Vuk Karadžić and Jernej Kopitar in Vienna (D. 1970: 1–10). Elizabeth Wilson, Duncan’s widow, revealed the personal memories of the years spent in Serbia and the reasons for writing this biography at the Scientific Meeting of Slavists, organized by the International Slavistic Center in 1988:

[...] So, when Duncan started writing about Vuk he did not see him only in international context but in the context of his native country, his Serbia that Vuk had been proud of and that he had done so much for. In the end, it must be said that Duncan was fascinated by Vuk. Critics wrote that Duncan was objective and that he “liked and understood Vuk” (E. Wilson 1988: 337–343).

And last, but certainly not least. With his studies on Marko Kraljević in the Anglo-Saxon mirror, as well as on the poetics of Vuk’s singers, Svetozar Koljević left an indelible mark on interpretations of Vuk’s work in the English-speaking world in the 20th century.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Вук, Пјеснарица: Вук Стеф. Караџић, *Пјеснарица 1814–1815, Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. 1, прир. Владан Недић, Београд: Просвета, 1965.
- Вук, Преписка I: Вук Стеф. Караџић, *Преписка I (1811–1821), Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. 20, прир. Голуб Добрашиновић са сарадницима, Београд: Просвета, 1988.
- Вук СНП I: *Српске народне пјесме*, скупио их и на свијет издао Вук Стеф. Караџић, књ. I, *Различне женске пјесме* (1841), *Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. IV, прир. Владан Недић, Издање о стогодишњици смрти Вука Стефановића Караџића 1864–1964, Београд: Просвета, 1975.
- Вук, СНП II: *Српске народне пјесме*, скупио их и на свијет издао Вук Стеф. Караџић, књ. II, у којој су пјесме јуначке најстарије, Беч, 1845. *Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. V, прир. Радмила Пешић, Издање о стогодишњици смрти Вука Стефановића Караџића 1864–1964, Београд: Просвета, 1988.
- Вук, СНП III: *Српске народне пјесме*, скупио их и на свијет издао Вук Стеф. Караџић, књ. III, у којој су пјесме јуначке средњијех времена, Беч, 1846. *Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. VI, прир. Радован Самарџић, Издање о стогодишњици смрти Вука Стефановића Караџића 1864–1964, Београд: Просвета, 1988.
- Вук, СНП IV: Вук Стефановић Караџић, *Српске народне пјесме*, књ. IV, 1862, *Сабрана дела Вука Караџића*, књ. 7, прир. Љубомир Зуковић, Издање о стогодишњици смрти Вука Стефановића Караџића 1864–1964, Београд: Просвета, 1986.

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RECEPCIJA DELA VUKA STEF. KARADŽIĆA NA ENGLESKOM JEZIČKOM PODRUČJU

Rezime: U radu se govori o prvim prevodima dela Vuka Stef. Karadžića na engleski jezik. Posebno se skreće pažnja na prevode Džona Bauringa. U drugom delu akcentuju se najvažnije teorijske rasprave u XX veku koje Vukovo delo situiraju u diskurs razmatranja usmene formativnosti, pitanja odnosa usmeno-pisano u folkloru, te barataju poznijim prevodima, antologijama i izborima kojima su se posebno teorijski bavili prof. Svetozar Koljević, akademik Nada Milošević-Dorđević, dr Mirjana Detelić, prof. dr Snežana Samardžija i dr. Poseban oslonac u pregledu građe predstavljala je knjiga o Vukovom delu u prevodu prof. Sandre Josipović (Vuk Stefanović Karadžić: Serbian traditional oral heritage / redaction, introduction and comments Boško Suvajdžić; [translated by Sandra Josipović]. Belgrade : Vuk's Foundation, 2016).

Gljučne reči: Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, Džon Bauring, prevodi, englesko jezičko područje, epska formula, odnos usmeno-pisano, Vukova zadužbina.