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*Dans ce numero,* Balcanica *publie un petit nombre d'exposés, presentés dans la section C-littérature au V congres de l'Association internationale d'études de l'Europe du sud-est, qui a eu lieu à Belgrade du 11 au 17 septembre 1984.*

*La section de littérature n'était pas au complet car seulement 34 des 52 participants annoncés s'étaient présentés. Au cours des cinq réunions, qui se sont tenues en majeure partie le matin, les 34 exposés des participants venus d'Albanie, d'Autriche, de Bulgarie, de Grande-Bretagne, d'Italie, de Yougoslavie, des USA, de FRA et RDA, d'Union Soviétique et de Tchécoslovaquie ont été présentés et discutés. Le dernier jour des travaux du Congres, la section de littérature a organisé une Table Ronde sur le thème:* International Trends in Prose as represented in Southeastern Europe.

*Parmi les exposés présentés, certains avaient déjà été publiés dans leurs propres pays avant le Congres, d'autres ont été publiés dans diverses publications plus tard. C'est pourquoi le bureau de rédaction de* Balcanica *a fait un choix restreint de travaux au sujet desquels il a été établi de façon certaine qu'ils n'ont été publiés nulle part jusqu' à présent.*

*A Belgrade, le 12 février 1990. Predrag Palavestra, academicien*

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Original Scholary Work

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# THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN YUGOSLAVIA IN BRITISH NOVEL

The British involvement in Yugoslav matters during World War Two had many different forms. It has been comprehensively discussed and analyzed in history books and well portrayed in memoirs. It is less generally known that some British writers of distinction have given fictionalised accounts of wartime Yugoslavia and the entanglement of British forces and members of British military missions in the events leading to the establishment of a new regime after war.

I propose to assess in this short paper ways in which three British authors used the background of the Yugoslav civil war and resistance in their novels, limiting myself in my analysis only on those aspects of their narratives which reflect their views on moral and political implications of Yugoslav struggle and on the consequences that struggle had for the British participants, and the mutual view they had on each others. The novels in question are Evelyn Waugh's *Unconditional Surrender*, Thomas Kenneally's *Season in Purgatory*, and Anthony McCandless's *Leap in the Dark*. The fact that Waugh is English, Kenneally Australian and McCandless Irish adds in my mind to the representativeness of this group of writers, two of which had spent some time in Yugoslavia during World War Two: Evelyn Waugh as a member of the British mission in Topusko with the GHQ of the Partisan army in Croatia; Anthony McCandless as a Royal Marine Commando officer in various parts of the country. Kennealy is the only one who did not have any first hand knowledge of wartime Yugoslavia. The historical and geographical background of his novel is based on published records and books and therefore it is, however rich in information, less accurate in detail. That neither of them is (or in the case of Waugh, who died in 1966, was) a fluent Serbo-Croat speaker is shown by numerous errors in Serbo-Croatian words, phrases,

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and personal and geographical names scattered throughout the novels.

Let me mention in passing that Kenneally has been accused for plagiarizing an American novel, *The Island of Terrible Friends* by Bill Strutton, the book of strikingly similar theme but of less literary merit than *Season in Purgatory*. This is a very good indication that the themes with the background of the Yugoslav resistance in the Second World War and the British contribution to Yugoslav war efforts have attracted some writers of a more popular appeal, whose entertaining stories of remarkable war exploits of both British and Yugoslav participants are best exemplified by Alistair MacLean's novels *Force 10 from Navarone* and *Partisans*.

The novels under discussion have some common features. Their characters are mainly British soldiers of every ability, class and creed, and Partisans who are brave, tough, and (particularly their commissars) rigidly doctrinaire. In the background are Germans, chetniks and followers of the Poglavnik colliding with the Partisans and occasionally with the British soldiers in bloody and confusing skirmishes and battles.

Yugoslavia is the setting of only one, the final section of Waugh's novel *Unconditional Surrender*, which concludes his trilogy about the Second World War where he tried "to describe in terms of a fictional experience close to his own the significance to men and women of the ordeal of the crisis of civilisation which reached its climax in World War Two" (Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh, London 1975, p. 414).

Guy Crouchback, the hero of the novel, is briefed before his departure for Croatia about the situation in Yugoslavia by Major Cattermole and Brigadier Cape. Their conflicting views are a vivid example of the ambivalence of the British position regarding the Partisans after their change of heart which brought British liason officer in contact with the Communist resistance movement.

Cattermole evokes his days spent in Yugoslavia as "a transforming experience". He expresses his admiration for the Partisan cause in a series of exultant exclamations which Waugh depicts as "something keener than loyalty, equally impersonal, a counterfeit almost of mystical love as portrayed by the sensual artists of the high baroque". Camaraderie among Partisan officers and men and among males and females, patriotic passion, strict observance of a particularly strict moral code of behaviour which involves the absence of sexual passion, and spectacles of courage of which, he says, he would have been "sceptical in the best authenticated classical text" are mentioned as the contributing factors to Cattermole's "transformation". But he touches on some military and political matters as well. He gives sceptical

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Crouchback his detailed exposition of " huge, intricately involved campaign of encirclements and counter-attacks", his dosaproval of the "royalist government in exile squatting in London", and his respect for the Partisans who are "pinning down three times as many troops as the whole Italian campaign". He also explains to Crouchback that the Yugoslavs accept the British as allies, but warns him that they "look on the Russians as leaders" because it is a part of their historical inheritance of Pan-Slavism. "We are foreigners to them", he says. "They accept what we send them. They have no reason to feel particularly grateful. It is they who are fighting and dying. Some of our less sophisticated men get confused and think it is a matter of politics... There are no politics in war-time; just love of country and love of race — and the partisans know we belong to a different race. That's how misunderstandings sometimes arise."

Joe Cattermole, who is described by Brigadier Cape as an enthusiast who is loved by "the Jugs" who "don't love many of us", and who loves the Jugoslavs, "which is something more unusual still", has his counterparts in the other two novels. Both Fielding in *Season in Purgatory* and Henderson in *Leap in the Dark* share Cattermole's enthusiasm, and they are representative figures symbolical of the strong emotional bond struck up between the British and the Yugoslavs who fought together in 1940s.

On his part, Brigadier Cape warns Crouchback to take what Cattermole says "with a grain of salt". His analysis of military situation in Yugoslavia is rather different. It is cynically cold, and he sees the British involvement in the Yugoslav campaign as matter of convenience. For him the Jugs are "suspicious lot of bastards" who are useful to the British only by being a nuisance to the Germans. "The job of this mission is to keep the nuisance going with the few bits and pieces we are allowed... We are soldiers, not politicians. Our job is simply to do all we can to hurt the enemy. Neither you nor I are going to make his home in Jugoslavia after the war. How they choose to govern themselves is entirely their business. Keep clear of politics. That's the first rule of this mission."

Advised by both Cattermole and Cape that politics is something to be kept at bay, Waugh's *alter ego,* Crouchback, finds it impossible to remain politically neutral observer of the events of which he is forced to be a hesitant witness. When he, a devoted catholic, eventually comes to Croatia, he finds himself in a very awkward situation helping the communist cause for which he feels nothing but detastation. Therefore he rejects both Cattermole's emotional enthusiasm and Cape's political pragmatism and adopts the point of view of a hostile, cynical, occassionally almost satirical observer of partisan efforts, of their treatment of their allies and their own people and of their ultimate

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political aims. In his view, the partisans are "bloody minded lot of bastards", suspicious, rigid and brutal, and among very few things he finds praiseworthy about them is "a kind of dignity about their tattered uniforms".

Evelyn Waugh's English biographer Christopher Sykes remarks that in Crouchback Waugh "gave expression to his naive and impractical political ideas", and that he "suffered from the myopia which afflicts most writers, and artists of any kind, when they mix in or are forced into politics. Like all reactionaries", continues Sykes, Waugh was "uncapable of a positive proposition ... and he had no alternative British policy to suggest in the place of the ruthless pragmatic solution."

However, Major Cattermole was right in one respect. For Guy Crouchback his days in Yugoslavia, and the war in general, were "a transforming experience". The man who thought originally that his "private honour would be satisfied by war", and that he would assert his "manhood by killing and being killed" rejects the war in a sober awareness of its harshness, cruelty and futility.

His wartime experiences have the same effect on David Pelham, a British surgeon from *Season in Purgatory*, who comes to Yugoslavia in order to help both the Yugoslav and the British wounded and — to rescue his life from futility. For him the war is first and foremost an endless stream of "diabolic wounds", and his wartime surgical exploits help him to establish himself, after the war, as "one of the best orthopaedic surgeons in the western world". But his professional engagement helps him to deepen his awareness of some ideas which "run in and out of the minds of many people in peace and war". As a witness of the acts of savagery committed by either side, he finds that "masters of the ideologies, even the bland ideology of democracy, were blood-crazed. That at the core of their political fervour, there stood a desire to punish with death anyone who hankered for other systems than those approved". This awareness implants pacifist ideas "like an extra organ in Pelham's gut" for the rest of his life, and encourages him "to join sociaties which his colleagues and his women would always consider beneath him."

In the moment of a personal crisis, his orderly Fielding, who translates in his spare time Yugoslav folk songs and after the war becomes a professor of Slavonic Studies, accuses Pelham for belonging to a "bloody arrogant class" which "have opressed half the world as well as ninety per cent of the population of the British Isles." He has a personal grudge against Pelham for seducing and discarding a Yugoslav girl to which he himself has been attracted. He blames Pelham for his class arogance in an emotional outburst: "To you the Yugoslavs are unwashed savages. They don't know how to keep the score in tennis,

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do they sir? You show no sense, no sense at all, that they are the futire and you are already a museum piece."

The events prove Fielding's accusation to be both simplification and exaggeration. Pelham redeems himself first af all by his enthusiastic committal to the benefit of his patients, and, eventually by a significant change of heart in his outlook owing to his increased insight into the scope of Yugoslav suffering and the motives of their brutality towards the enemy.

The conflicts of this kind occur throughout the nóvels. In most cases they are described not as conflicts of class, ideology or politics, but as misunderstandings between the adherents of two different value systems moulded by different historical destiny of the two peoples. It is most succintly expressed in the novel *Leap in the Dark*, when Karla Bilić, a former medical student known under her partisan name of Doctor Olga, meets after the war her former British friend and lover, Ian Henderson, and tells him that her father and two of her brothers were killed in the war "by people on different sides", while her third brother, a real war criminal, lives abroad in exile.

"The trouble with you bloody British", she says, "is that for centuries you've been running around fighting wars and winning them, and thinking that it's all very romantic and getting sentimental about your dead. You're very good at all of it. The only thing you've forgotten is that you always fight in someone else's country. You got some bombing in the last war but fundamentally your mourning is always for young men who died away from home. A silent tear on Armstice Day at the village war memorial when they play the Last Post and a few drinks in the pub afterwards while everyone explains that that's the way that old Charley or whoever it was would have wanted it. With us it's different. We get fought over, regularly. Our families, our homes, our crops, our livelihoods get destroyed and desecrated and dispersed. To you war's a dangerous game. To us it's a bitter, recurrent, devastating reality."

It is more common that in these novels, which depict the war as a leap by mankind into a heart of darkness where violence and brutality are sometimes shown to have their humorous and bizzare sides, the perspective is reversed, and the British view of the Yugoslavs presented. It is best summed up in the exchange of reminiscences and views of Henderson and Karla's British halfbrother Tomislav in McCandless's novel. They find themselves in agreement about everything except "the casual callousness with which prisoners were dispatched" on the part of the Partisans. While for Henderson killing prisoners "was unforgivable and a matter for unqualified disgust", Tomislav, who was half-Croat, "found the practice repellent but understandable".

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Their points of agreement which I am going to put in front of you will inevitably bring this paper to its conclusion in what I would hope to be an appropriate way. Henderson and Tomislav share "admiration for Partisan courage and cheerfulness" and "an immense, simple liking for most of the people they had been in contact with", particularly for "peasants who were called peasants, unselfconsciously called themselves peasants and would continue to be called peasants after a Communist government assumed power." They have "respect for the integrity of most of the Partisan leadership coupled to exasperation at the unimaginative doctrinaire rigidity of some of it" and "sympathy for the appalling problems posed for individuals by the conflicting pulls of competing ideologies in a three-cornered civil war" and caused by wrong but honourable choices made by people, for which they pay with their lives and the suffering of their families. Both of them love Yugoslav singing and dances, and have a special appreciation of their *vino* and *rakija*.

Finally, the author mentions Tomislav's and Henderson's response to a Yugoslav feature the benevolent recognition of which on part of our friends must be in my mind the utmost proof of their friendship. It is their "affectionate irritation at a people who seemed to plan nothing until the last moment and then miraculously achieved spectacular triumphs, usually different from what they had originally intended, but just as good, or better."

I hope that this Congress will prove them right.

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