

UDK 93/99

ISSN: 1845-4380

REVIEW OF CROATIAN HISTORY

REVUE FÜR KROATISCHE GESCHICHTE

REVUE D' HISTOIRE CROATE



Hrvatski institut za povijest
Croatian Institute of History
VI. no. 1 (2010)

From Bias to Erroneous Conclusions

The article by Nevenko Bartulin, “The NDH as a ‘Central European Bulwark against Italian Imperialism’: An Assessment of Croatian-Italian Relations Within the German ‘New Order’ in Europe 1941-1945,” published in the *Review of Croatian History*, the journal of the Croatian Institute of History,¹ has once more sparked debate on an interesting topic: Italian imperialism as one of the key reasons for greater Croatian dependence on the Third Reich in 1941-1945, and the forms and extent of this dependence. Somewhat akin to Bartulin, I also believe that this hypothesis can be accepted in a general sense, since Italian territorial pretensions and attempts at political, economic and cultural penetration of Croatia crucially influenced the strategic orientation of official Zagreb at the time.

Illustrations of Italian policy, and the Croatian attempts to avoid open confrontation with its disproportionately more powerful Apennine neighbor, which was incomparably more important to Hitler in both the actual and symbolic sense than Croatia, are so numerous that – if nothing else, then not entirely concealed tendencies – there is no need to resort to falsehoods, fabrications and questionable assertions. This is why I believe Bartulin did not need fall back on unproven and unprovable claims, which are more at home among wartime anti-Ustasha (and even general anti-Croatian) propaganda, rather than constituting irrefutable facts as he presents them.

Such, for example, are the assertions on the regime’s instrumentalization of the origin of the Croats,² on the Italian acceptance of “a division of the Balkans into German and Italian ‘zones’ of influence – in reality, occupation – on 21-22 April 1941,” on the meeting between the German and Italian foreign ministers,³ or on the marching hymn *Naprijed, mornari s plavog Jadrana* (‘Onward, Sailors of the Blue Adriatic’) being “officially banned in the NDH at the insistence of the Italians.”⁴

Bartulin offers no evidence for any of these or similar statements.

For one cannot count as evidence historiographic, publicist or propagandist assessments that all suffer from the same ailment: they are regularly based on unreliable sources, and most often based on none at all. It is not true that the

¹ N. Bartulin, “The NDH as a ‘Central European Bulwark against Italian Imperialism,’” *Review of Croatian History*, 3/2007, 1, 61-70.

² Ibid., 53-54.

³ Ibid., 56.

⁴ Ibid., 65.

marching hymn “Onward, Sailors of the Blue Adriatic” was officially banned,⁵ nor is it true that there was any official, legally-sanctioned view on the origin of the Croats.⁶ It is also not true that any “zones of influence” between Germany and Italy were negotiated, much less demarcated, in Vienna on 22-22 April – all that was specified was a line of demarcation between the German and Italian armed forces, which should be strictly distinguished from a political arrangement on the allocation of spheres of influence, which was concluded between Berlin and Rome earlier, with no consideration for the Croats or the Independent State of Croatia.

However, even more intriguing is Bartulin’s claim that Ustasha propaganda, driven by anti-Italian motives, even embraced the attribute *barbarism*, for in this way Croatian nationalism could more forcefully confront Italian, or “Latin ‘civilization’”⁷ As an argument to back this hypothesis, Bartulin stresses that the description of the Croats as “a nation of ‘wolves and lions’” established a link between the National Socialist understandings of the term barbarism. He adds: “Interestingly, the Ustashe liked to use the Turkish word for lion, ‘arslan,’ rather than the Croatian ‘lav;’ for the former was more common to the Dinaric Croats of the formerly Ottoman ruled areas.”⁸

Bartulin did not mention how often this metaphor was used, so the less informed reader would be correct to think that it was a common, almost everyday component of Ustasha propaganda.

This procedure is illustrative of the manner in which Bartulin reaches conclusions and, I daresay, also reveals the deep impression left upon him by the theories of sociologist Dinko Tomašić and his epigones on the allegedly dramatic differences and divisions between “Dinaric” and other Croats.

This is not the place to discuss the roots and motives underlying Tomašić’s quasi-scientific assessments, nor the role played in this motivation by the Serbian ethnographer Jovan Cvijić and the political manipulation of his nonsense about the racial features of the “Yugoslavs.” It is also impossible to here unravel the racialist and racist foundation of Yugoslavism as a political, state, and “national” notion. However, anyone who knows anything about current affairs in Croatia will know that theories of “Dinaric” and other “elements,” in a some-

⁵ Negatives cannot be proved, because it is impossible to prove that something did not exist. But when he claims a positive, i.e., that an official ban existed, Bartulin should have cited evidence, and not simply cited the statement by Nada Kisić-Kolanović, who, in her book *NDH i Italija. Političke veze i diplomatski odnosi*, similarly cites absolutely no evidence for this claim! Using this same “scientific” method, some future writer may tomorrow cite Bartulin as a reliable source! But he simply copied somebody else’s text.

⁶ Cf. Mario Jareb, “Jesu li Hrvati postali Goti? Odnos ustaša i vlasti Nezavisne Države Hrvatske prema neslavenskim teorijama o podrijetlu Hrvata,” *Spomenica dr. Jere Jareba. Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 40/2008, no. 3: 869-882.

⁷ N. Bartulin, “The NDH as a ‘Central European Bulwark against Italian Imperialism,’ 61-70.

⁸ Ibid., 68-70.

what altered and adapted form (but again with a clear political undertone!), have been revived over the past roughly two decades. Just as when these theories were first devised and their creators and advocates ignored or downplayed the significance and consequences of the powerful migratory waves which are a tragic constant of Croatian history, so too does it proceed today: political motives dictate conclusions drawn on the basis of preconceived beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes.

Another problematic aspect of Bartulin's hypothesis on the deliberate and systematic Ustasha acceptance of "barbarism" is that it overlooks not just one, but thousands of examples of prewar and wartime propaganda by Croatian nationalists (from Pilar and Lukas, through Šufflay to Pavelić and the Ustasha) in which the Croats are extolled as a highly civilized Western nation with the historical task of defending Europe and the West from barbarians and barbarism from the East.

Never has any political force among the Croatian people, including the Ustasha, either invoked or desired the Croats to be considered barbarians, for it was generally (partially even instinctively) known that this would be grist for the mill of foreign antagonists. For it was not only the colonial powers that justified their imperialist campaigns with claims that the African or American natives were "barbarians" or "savages," who could neither survive nor organize a modern society without a foreign overlord. In the Croatian case, similar arguments were made by Vienna and Budapest and Rome. Italian imperialist ambitions in the First World War and the postwar Italian occupation of a not insignificant portion of Croatian territory – which was grounded in the Treaties of London and Rapallo, which in terms of extent and consequences do not lag far behind the Rome Treaties of 1941, something that is so easily ignored – were justified by the claim that the "Slavs," that is the Croats and Slovenes, were little more than barbarians.

Croatia's writers also responded to the imperialist designs of their more powerful neighbors, cloaked in – by the criteria of the day – the moralist robes of alleged enlighteners and civilizers, who would bring the refined culture of Dante and Goethe to these barbarians. In this they undoubtedly made use of the old, romantic notion of the Croats as the "bulwark of Christianity" (*Antemurale Christianitatis*). The Croatian bitterness over this notion was more a case of reassuring themselves than something actually acknowledged by the West, and this can be followed in the works of Croatian writers from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, and particularly since the era of the national awakening.

Primary school literature textbooks, for example, include the apparently – actually quite openly ironic exaltation of barbarism in the well-known poem

by August Šenoa, “Croatia’s Slanderer” from 1878.⁹ This same poet also ironically treated the impressions which grew around Baron Franz von der Trenck and his pandours, on the Croats as barbarians or a people who even devour children.¹⁰ This was an expression of futile bitterness over the two-faced stance of the European West, which is mentioned in the almost emblematic verses by Mažuranić, written in 1846: “...Nor should you be proclaimed barbarians / just for dying while they slept!”¹¹ or in those by one of the most renowned poems from August Harambašić’s ‘freedom-loving’ cycle (*Slobodarka*, Zagreb, 1883.): “...Let the Russians boast of their immensity, / Or the French of their glorious fatherland, / Or the English of their invincible navy! / I envy not any of their virtues: / For outside of Croatia I see no beauty, / I take pride in it, and its ‘barbarism’...”¹²

This same psychological and political problem is very specifically, almost obsessively, treated in a considerable portion of the works of the most important leftist Croatian writer, the communist Miroslav Krleža, particularly in his novellas (the collection entitled ‘The Croatian God Mars’ – *Hrvatski bog Mars*) and poetry (*Balade Petrice Kerempuha* [‘Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh’]), but also in his novels (e.g. *Banket u Blitvi* [‘Banquet in Blithuania’], *Zastave* [‘Flags’]).

The peaceful non-violence preached by Stjepan Radić and his Croatian (Republican) Peasant Party after World War I certainly did not help overcome this Croatian complex. This non-violence and deep feeling of belonging to the West made a powerful mark on the entirety of Croatian political and social life, and they were not limited to Radić and his party.

This is why there is a considerable number of more than reliable evidence that even after the creation of the Yugoslav state, Croatian nationalists, precisely in their contacts with Italian political, diplomatic and intelligence officials, highlighted these elements, non-violence and the feeling of belonging to the West, as among the most important factors in the weakness of the Croatian position in the dispute with the Serbs as the wanton and savage exponents of Eastern barbarism. Croatian separatists explained that they needed foreign as-

⁹ August Šenoa, “Klevetnikom Hrvatske,” *Djela Augusta Šenoe*, sv. I. - *Pjesme*, Slavko Ježić, ed. (Zagreb, 1934), pp. 314-316.

¹⁰ A. Šenoa, “Kakvu Hrvati djecu jedu,” *Pjesme*, 118-123.

¹¹ “...Nit bi zato barbarim ve zvali, / što vi mroste dok su oni spali!”, Ivan MAŽURANIĆ, “Smrt Smail-age Čengića.” *Sabrana djela Ivana Mažuranića*. Ivo Frangeš and Milorad Živančević, eds. (Zagreb, 1979), p. 82.

¹² “...Nek se diče Rusi svojom veličinom, / Il' Francezi svojom slavnom otačbinom, / Il' Englezi svojim svesilnim mornarstvom! / Ne zaviđam njima sve vrline ote: / Van Hrvatske za me ne ima ljepote, / Ja se dičim njome i njenim ‘barbarstvom’...”, August Harambašić, “Hrvatskoj.” *Ukupna djela Augusta Harambašića*, sv. I. - *Lirika* (1877-1881), Julije Benešić, ed. (Zagreb, 1942), pp. 125-127.

sistance for their liberation precisely because they were not "Balkan enough" and because they had no aptitude for "barbaric methods."¹³

The extent to which widespread awareness of this Croatian mood influenced the official policies of Belgrade is subject to debate. But perhaps the assessment made by King Alexander Karađorđević after the assassination of Radić and his colleagues on the floor of parliament at the end of 1929 should not be so easily discounted. Seeking support from so-called democratic Europe for the proclamation of his dictatorship, Alexander, according to information obtained by Ante Trumbić in Paris at the time, dismissed the fears and reservations of his French sponsors with these words: "The Croats are pacifists and therefore not a threat. (...) There's no danger of the Croats proclaiming independence."¹⁴

This is why the dynamism and bellicosity of the Ustasha and the nurturing of the "cult of Rakovica" as a symbol of rebellion and resistance were not only an expression of the declarative revolutionary spirit of a nationalist organization, but also a response to the pacifist mood in Croatian political life, which at times even acquired fatalistic forms. However, when he claims that the Ustasha supposedly pounded their chests and extolled barbarism, Bartulin should have stressed that there were many texts and declarations by Croatian (Ustasha) politicians, publicists and propagandists which prior to establishment of the Independent State of Croatia and afterward – precisely in the context of calling upon Croats to resist and even to engage in armed warfare – underlined Croatia's Western tradition and its anti-barbaric function (A. Pavelić, M. Lorković, I. Bogdan, I. Oršanić, D. Crljen, M. Kovačić, J. Makanec, V. Rieger, T. Mortigija, B. Kavran, M. Karamarko, G. Pejnović, etc.).

Since this is a discussion of propaganda rather than what actually happened in the real world, it is worthwhile adding here that once the Ustasha assumed power, one of their orders for Ustasha activity and comportment stressed: "The Ustasha is not an oppressor, nor a barbarian, the Ustasha is not a destroyer. The Ustasha is a guardian of hard-won state independence, he is a defender of the hard-won works of his *Poglavnik* (Leader)."¹⁵ In this context it is only proper to recall this same formula was also included almost verbatim in the official documents of the Ustasha Movement, among the "duties of the Ustasha." These repeatedly stipulated: "A genuine Ustasha is neither an oppressor nor barbarian, rather a guardian and defender of the freedom of his homeland."¹⁶

¹³ Cf. James J. Sadkovich, *Italija i ustaše 1927.-1937.* (Zagreb, 2010), p. 39 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb, 1978), p. 35.

¹⁵ "Ustaški dužnostnici moraju raditi ustaški," *Ustaša. Vjesnik Hrvatskog ustaškog oslobodilačkog pokreta*, 11/1941, no. 3, 3 July 1941, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Hrvatski narod. Glasilo Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* (hereinafter: HN), 4/1942, no. 476, 15 July 1942, 1.

It may also be noted that in Croatian wartime propaganda, barbarism was not accepted for Croats, rather it was persistently ascribed to the wartime opponents of the Axis, both the Soviets (on a daily basis) as well as the Anglo-Americans (quite often). For example, the British sinking of hospital ships was called “the new barbarism,”¹⁷ the English “barbaric treatment of prisoners” was condemned,¹⁸ and so forth. However, while he claims without any evidence that the Ustasha took pride in the attributes of barbarians, Bartulin did not include a single word on anything mentioned herein. So one may only speculate: either he is unaware of any of this, or he felt it necessary to ignore it, for it does not fit into his preferred stereotypes – or should I say *deliberate plan*?

And in light of these facts, the aforementioned way in which Bartulin read and interpreted the proposition of Croats as “the progeny of wolves and lions” is particularly troubling.

It is actually not terribly important that the writer is incorrect in thinking that the word *arslan* only means lion, for there are actually few Croatian dictionaries that link the word solely to this definition.¹⁹ These same dictionaries show that it is known or common neither to *only* “Dinaric Croats,” nor to *all* “Dinaric Croats” (if the content of this term were only possible to ascertain!), rather it is known and used by Croats outside of the Dinaric zone.²⁰ For example, a “typical Dinaric” like the converted Muslim, Fr. Lovro Šitović (Ljubuški, 1682 – Šibenik, 1729), in his “Poem from Hell” uses the word *lav* for lion rather than *arslan*: “They inflict upon us armies and all hoards / Lions (*Lave*), serpents and other afflictions,”²¹ while a “typical Pannonian” like the linguist Ivan Belostenec (Varaždin, ca 1594 – Lepoglava, 1675), in his dictionary first offers for the Latin *leo*, *-onis*, *m.* the word *oroszlan*, while the translation *lav* is only provided second.²² Also, the word *arslan* is not known in the local dialectal dictionaries and linguistic studies dealing with the territories which in the geographic sense belong to the Dinaric belt, which were otherwise highly favored by the Ustasha Movement (such as, say, the Imotski area or western Herzegovina).²³

¹⁷ HN, 4/1942, no. 530, 16 Sept. 1942, p. 1.

¹⁸ HN, 4/1942, no. 553, 13 Oct. 1942, 5., and no. 558, 18 Oct. 1942, p. 15.

¹⁹ Cf. for example, *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika. Dio I: A – Česuļa*. Published by the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Science. Prepared by Đ. Daničić (Zagreb, 1880-1882), p. 113.; Zlatko Herkov, *Grada za finacijsko-pravni rječnik feudalne epohe Hrvatske*, vol. I (Zagreb, 1956), p. 68; Vladimir Anić et al., *Hrvatski enciklopedijski rječnik*, sv. 1: A – Bez (Zagreb, 2004), p. 168, etc.

²⁰ Petar Skok, *Etimolijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika. Knjiga prva. A-J* (Zagreb, 1971), p. 63; Abdulah Škaljić, *Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom jeziku* (Sarajevo, 1989), p. 99.

²¹ L. Šitović, “Pisma od pakla,” www.imoart.hr, 23 July 2010.

²² Joannes Bellostenecz, *Gazophylacium* (Zagreb, 1740), p. 743.

²³ These words cannot be found in: Mate Šimundić, *Govor Imotske krajine i Bekije*, Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, Djela XLI, Odjeljenje društvenih nauka, vol. 26 (Sarajevo, 1971); Asim Peco, *Ikavskoštakavski govor zapadne Hercegovine*, ANUBiH, Djela LXI,

However, much more important than these linguistic and philological considerations is this: the metaphor of the Croats as “the progeny of wolves and lions” was not an invention of Ustasha propaganda, rather it was almost certainly derived from the renowned verse of one of the most popular Croatian poets of the first half of the twentieth century, Vladimir Nazor (1876-1949). If not even this is familiar to Bartulin, then a grave problem arises. But if he did in fact know that the metaphor on “the progeny of wolves and lions” may have been linked to Nazor, and opted to ignore this, then the problem is even more serious!

These are verses published for decades in every collection of Nazor’s works and, with equal if not greater frequency, in school textbooks. Moreover, they are taken as a classical example of the poetic expression of “collective resistance and national self-awareness.”²⁴

Namely, the first edition of Nazor’s book of poems on the Croatian kings, *Knjiga o kraljevima hrvatskijem* (Zadar, 1903) included his poem “They saith: You’ve e'er been slaves...,” which contains these verses:

“...And upon these words / In me all boils and surges. No, it is not so! – we are barbarians, too / Who bequeathed themselves their own life. (...) An impure flame yet smolders in our blood. / And now a beast lurks within us, / Which gave claws to our great-grandfathers / And fangs and horns for confrontations and clashes. / ...Neither doves nor lambs! Just a tale / So says the legend of our vocation: / We too have bloodied our hands in slaughter...”²⁵

In all later editions of this same cycle, Nazor included the poem “That was long ago,” which contains the verse:

“...A liar is he who said we are the laurel branch, / The balsam on the wound, the rainbow in the cloud; / *We are the progeny of wolves and lions!*” (Author’s emphasis).²⁶

The latter poem was published as an introductory and programmatic entry in the re-publication of Nazor’s patriotic poetry released in 1912 by the literary

Odjeljenje društvenih nauka, vol. 35 (Sarajevo, 1987); Ivan Branko Šamija – Petar Ujević, *Rječnik imotskoga govora* (Zagreb, 2001), etc.

²⁴ Joža Skok, “Vladimir Nazor: Pjesme,” *Metodički pristup književnoumjetničkom tekstu. Lirika. Priručnik za nastavnike srpskohrvatskog – hrvatskosrpskog jezika u osnovnoj školi*, Dragutin Rosandić, ed. (Sarajevo, 1975), p. 244.

²⁵ “..A na rijeći te / U meni kipi i buni se sve. Ne, nije tako! – I mi smo barbari, / Što život svoj su sebi darovali. (...) Plam nečist još u našoj krvini tinja. / I sad u nama kunja životinja, / Što pradjedima našim pandže dade / I Zub i rog za kavge i zavade. / ...Ni golubi ni janjci! Priča puka / Legenda ta je o našemu zvanju: / I mi smo ruke mastili u klanju...”, Vladimir Nazor, I., *Pjesme – Medvjed Brundo – Ahasver – O poeziji*, Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti, vol. 77, Šime Vučetić, ed. (Zagreb, 1965), pp. 89-91, 103.

²⁶ “...Slaga tko reče da smo lovor-grana, / Melem na rani, duga u oblaku; / *Mi porod jesmo vuka i arslana!*” *Ibid.*

and cultural organizations Matica hrvatska and Matica dalmatinska.²⁷ Even though he later claimed that he had introduced the motif of the “ancient Croatian sea wolf” to his poetry earlier, already in 1902,²⁸ Nazor himself provoked doubts as to whether the image of “wolves and lions” was entirely his and original, or if he borrowed it from Italian literature. Exceptionally well-versed in Italian literature, he had written about D’Annunzio’s *La Nave* (‘The Ship’), so that he noted: “In ‘*La Nave*’ the writer also mentions the Croats. Someone somewhere in it says: ‘*I lupi di Croazia tengono il mare*’ (‘Croatian wolves rule the sea)...”²⁹

The famous Italian poet, who is otherwise not fondly remembered in Croatian history, wrote about the Croats in 1908, making use of the metaphor of them as *wolves*. And Nazor, who was raised in a milieu in which the phrase ‘sea wolf’ could be heard every day and which had absolutely no negative connotations, only repeated a similar poetic image. However, literary scholars also know that it had existed even earlier in Croatian literature: as opposed to the “Slavic mourning doves,” Šenoa already invoked “raging lions” as far back as 1865.³⁰

In other words, literary historians and theorists could doubtless engage in far-reaching deliberations on how original Nazor’s verses are in the thematic sense, the extent to which they reflect the spirit of the times, whether, besides D’Annunzio, they were also influenced by Walt Whitman and Filippo T. Marinetti, whether one hears in them the echoes of European futurism and expressionism, etc.

However, even more interesting in this context is that these verses adorned the flag not of the Croatian, but of the Yugoslav Nationalist Youth!

Nazor’s poetic path, like his life, did not proceed in a straight line, but without oversimplifying it can be said that his relatively brief Croatian patriotic phase, which made him exceptionally popular (and “our most patriotic poet,” as Antun Gustav Matoš said), was followed by a long period of Yugoslavism, embodied in his sympathy for the Belgrade regime (of Jeftić for example) and his later membership in the Yugoslav Partisan movement. And even in his early phase, prior to the First World War, it was precisely Nazor’s exultation of “barbarism” and Meštrović’s “barbaric aesthetic titanism” (Vladimir Čerina) that became emblematic features of that section of the Croatian youth which swore fealty to the so-called national unity of the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes as an expression of *racial* identity.

²⁷ V. Nazor, *Hrvatski kraljevi* (Zagreb, 1912), p. 3.

²⁸ V. Nazor, “Kobna lada ili Carducci, D’Annunzio i Hrvati,” *Hrvatsko kolo*, vol. XIII (Zagreb, 1932), pp. 17-18.

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ A. Šenoa, “Zlatni krst,” *Pjesme*, pp. 93-98 (97.)

One of the apostles of this “racial Yugoslavism,” the literary critic Milan Marjanović, recognized quite early a poetic reconstruction of Nodilo’s discussion of the “religion of Serbs and Croats” in Nazor’s fiery patriotic verses.³¹ Nazor’s motifs and his versifier’s skill therefore generally served Yugoslav rather than Croatian nationalists: he “presented himself as an explicitly national-romantic visionary and as such he became something of an idol to younger writers of a national Yugoslav orientation.”³²

The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) brought an intensification of Yugoslav propaganda, as well as the *political instrumentalization of art*. Periodicals with a Yugoslav bent “wrote with adulation about Meštrović and Nazor as shining models. Čerina remained dissatisfied with the activities of the youth, and particularly the passivity of those who led Croatian politics, so that he pictur-esque described this: ‘On the other side of the Drina, cannons fire, bombs explode and shrapnel flies, while on this side of the Drina the corks of champagne bottles pelt the ceilings of cafés and hotels.’ Ivo Andrić joined in on this thought, writing in an article about Antun Gustav Matoš: ‘All of Croatia snores repulsively. Only assassins and poets are awake’”³³

In contrast to this proverbial Croatian quietism, the Yugoslav integralist writer Vladimir Čerina, writing in the journal *Savremenik* in 1914, extolled Nazor as the “poet of us, the people of tomorrow,” in words that openly exalted the cult of power and barbarism: “He is a brash modern semi-barbarian, a neo-barbarian and his entire presence from *Živana* through *Lirika* (and *Hrvatski Kraljevi*), to *Nove Pjesme*, is unusually colossal. Unruly in Whitmanesque fashion. He is a legendary and mythical dreamer, who worships the Slavic god Perun, and his poetry possesses the beauty of the Homeric epic and Balkan heroism.”³⁴

Nazor thus came to the forefront of that literary group which, as Vučković said, preached “the cult of racial energy”: “Some common spiritual, philosophical/ethical and aesthetic tenets of the European avant-garde were transformed in line with the national circumstances of life in each country. Nothing was more natural than the writers of the small and oppressed Balkan peoples to subordinate everything to the struggle for liberation and to conceive the mysticism of the soul and internal life as an expression of national energy which acquires a mystical significance in their eyes. For, revolted by the situation in which they lived and having no clear and solid notion of how to deal with it, they found refuge in the *mystification* of the racial and national act, placing it

³¹ M. Marjanović, “Vladimir Nazor: ‘Živana,’ *Hrvatska književna kritika*, sv. III. – Milan Marjanović, (Zagreb, 1950), p. 191.

³² M. Šicel, *Hrvatska književnost* (Zagreb, 1982), p. 140.

³³ M. Šicel, *Književnost moderne. Povijest hrvatske književnosti u sedam knjiga*, Book V (Zagreb, 1978), p. 55.

³⁴ V. Čerina, “Pjesnik nas sutrašnjih,” *Savremenik* 1914, no. 6-7, 368. Cited from: Radovan Vučković, *Poetika hrvatskog i srpskog ekspressionizma* (Sarajevo, 1976), p. 42.

in the service of direct political action and incorporating it into their emotively and eclectically-synthetically comprehended system of philosophy/aesthetics and ethics.³⁵

Nazor's verse was thus not just an expression of his Yugoslav political orientation, but also a reflection of the spirit of that era. Literary critic Miroslav Šicel stressed that in contrast to the overriding spirit of intimism and pessimism, Nazor brought to Croatian literature "a poetry full of optimism and cheer, belief in one's own strength and the future."³⁶ This was also observed by Mate Ujević: "At the time of the premature and senescent feebleness of Croatian modernist poetry, Nazor raised the banner of vigor and heroism."³⁷

However, the elevated tone, patriotic pathos and metaphors such as those about "the progeny of wolves and lions," are components of what Vučković called the "mystification of the racial and political act," but simultaneously, quite frequently, the act itself. This is why it was followed by the Yugoslav (and not Croatian nationalist!) literati. Although himself an adherent of the Yugoslav ideology at the time, in 1912 Croatian poet Tin Ujević responded rather derisively to the ode to Nazor that Milan Begović put to verse. Citing Begović's verses dedicated to "Vlado" (i.e. Vladimir), which read: "...Oh, our song! In the mist and gloom / may it be the torch, inflamed / to halt the hate-filled demon from knelling its doom," Ujević observed that "Mr. Vladimir Nazor, to whom that tercet is dedicated[,] would have assuredly written it better and more forcefully."³⁸

Nazor's verses were therefore transformed into political slogans. One of the most highly esteemed Croatian literary critics, Antun Barac (who also had a Yugoslav orientation), in a discussion of Nazor's poetry, especially his patriotic poetry, already in 1918 underlined the following: "It took disenchantment, experience, and better observations to come to an entirely new view of ourselves: *"A liar is he who said we are the laurel branch, / The balsam on the wound, the rainbow in the cloud; / We are the progeny of wolves and lions!* No, we are not good, we are not gentle, we are not docile laborers who silently endure all imposed upon us. We are fighters, giants, destroyers, in our veins flows the blood of bandits and raiders who died, but who never surrendered, never gave in. This idea stands at the head of the 'Croatian Kings' (1912) and it is by

³⁵ R. Vučković, *Poetika hrvatskog i srpskog ekspresionizma*, pp. 61-62.

³⁶ M. Šicel, *Književnost moderne*, p. 234.

³⁷ Mate Ujević, *Hrvatska književnost. Pregled hrvatskih pisaca i knjiga, sa slikama* (Zagreb, 1932), p. 162.

³⁸ "...Oh, pjesma naša! U magli i tmuši / nek bude zublja bijesna, raspaljena / da zloduha je mržnja ne uguši", T. Ujević, "Milan Begović: Vrelo," *Sabrana djela, sv. VII. – Kritike, prikazi, članci, polemike o hrvatskoj i srpskoj književnosti* (Zagreb, 1965), p. 70.

the same token *the synthesis of everything Nazor wanted to say in these verses*" (author's emphasis).³⁹

Šime Vučetić (incidentally, yet another diehard adherent of Yugoslav thought and a member of the Yugoslav Partisan movement!) also, in his monograph on Nazor, highlighted the programmatic importance of these verses: "Nazor was the first to emphasize that we are at the very least not so tame, so that there emerged, to be sure not yet in the first edition, *this verse oft-cited over the course of so many generations* (author's emphasis): - *A liar is he who said we are the laurel branch, / The balsam on the wound, the rainbow in the cloud; / We are the progeny of wolves and lions!* – And not only that: we are actually wild 'barbarians' so when they did not 'draw us into adversity, we fought amongst ourselves like Cain...'".⁴⁰

In 1934, in the foreword to something of an anthology of poems by young Croatia "poets of the village," Kamilo Križanić also observed that this "*oft-cited over the course of so many generations*" verse, "*We are the progeny of wolves and lions*" was otherwise exploited for political purposes.⁴¹

Therefore, it will be difficult to prove that Ustasha propaganda claimed the attributes of barbarism as its own, and even more difficult, if not impossible, to prove that the metaphor of "the progeny of wolves and lions" was a standard feature or illustration of this propaganda. By the same token, it will be impossible to prove that such a metaphor in Ustasha propaganda ingratiated itself to the feelings of "the Dinaric Croats of the formerly Ottoman ruled areas." The authentic source of the phrase "wolves and lions" cannot be found in the ideologically motivated inventions of Ustasha propaganda, but rather in the poetry of Vladimir Nazor, while there are dictionaries – such as that of Julije Benešić – in which the confirmation of the (most common) meaning of that word cites precisely these verses of Nazor. Benešić found confirmation of the word *arslan* as meaning "lion" in the works of Mažuranić, Hanžeković and – Nazor: "A liar is he who said we are the laurel branch, / The balsam on the wound, the rainbow in the cloud; / *We are the progeny of wolves and lions!*"⁴²

In the end, it is worthwhile noting that in Ustasha propaganda, Nazor was long praised as "the greatest living Croatian poet," and that some of his works, such as "Brundo the Bear" were declared "the hymn to the native Croatian soil,

³⁹ A. Barac, "Vladimir Nazor" (1918), *Hrvatska književna kritika VII – Antun Barac* (Zagreb, 1962), p. 195.

⁴⁰ Š. Vučetić, *Vladimir Nazor: čovjek i pisac* (Zagreb, 1976), pp. 61-62.

⁴¹ *Lirika grude*. Edited and annotated by Mile Starčević, Zagreb, 1934, 5.

⁴² Julije BENEŠIĆ, *Rječnik hrvatskoga književnoga jezika od Preporoda do I. G. Kovačića, sv. 1: A – Burkati*, Zagreb, 1985, 41.

embodied in Velebit.”⁴³ But neither this nor “wolves and lions” has anything to do with the supposed exaltation of barbarism modeled after German national socialism.

Why Bartulin nonetheless insists otherwise is another matter altogether.

⁴³ Cf. the unsigned article “Medvedjed Brundo’ in Italian” in *HN*, 4/1942, no. 527, 12 Sept. 1942, 2.

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One should still know something about the things one doesn’t like. On the book by Michael Phayer, *Pius XII, the Holocaust and the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008)

When I read Phayer’s book *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*, which contains a chapter dedicated to the Catholic Church in the Independent State of Croatia, I was disappointed by the author’s poor knowledge of Croatian history and his general failure to consult the sources dealing with this topic that have emerged in Croatia in the past twenty years since the fall of communism. I was furthermore thunderstruck when I saw that this professor emeritus at Marquette University in Milwaukee forged an important Vatican document so that he could use it to condemn the actions of the Catholic Church in Croatia and Pope Pius XII. I pointed this out to the publisher and Libreria Vatican, which published the document, to which Phayer, over and above his faulty and tendentious translation, added a sentence that implies the involvement of the Holy See and the Catholic Church in Croatia in the persecution of the Jews (more on this later).

However, a publisher in Croatia took the effort to publish a translation of this selfsame professor’s second book mentioned in the title above. This book does not just have a single chapter dedicated to Croatia and Croatian Catholics, for the Croatian presence is interwoven throughout the entire book. According to Phayer’s interpretation of the history of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, the Independent State of Croatia (known under its Croatian acronym, NDH) and the leadership of the Catholic Church serve to denounce Pope Pius XII as an accomplice to the ignominious activities and crimes of the Ustasha authorities and, later, in allowing war criminals to escape