

# Croatian Latin Writers - an International Nationalist Phenomenon in a Socialist Republic

*Neven Jovanović*

This is a sketch of the history of reception of Croatian Neo-Latin literature in Croatia (and Yugoslavia) from the end of the World War Two until the late 70's. The Neo-Latin literature – literary use of Latin language from the times of **Petrarch** up to the present day – is in itself already a kind of reception; during the Early Modern period, Neo-Latin authors refashioned ancient themes, forms, and literary devices to express their own thoughts or achieve their own purposes. For a number of political and cultural reasons, Croatia – similarly to other countries of East Central Europe, such as Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland – has produced a rich corpus of writings in Latin. The corpus extends diachronically from the 10th until the 20th century. Quantitatively, until the middle of the 18th century Croatian authors have published in print twice as many texts in Latin than in Croatian (the ratio is roughly 6000:3000).<sup>1</sup>

Such extent and continuity make the Neo-Latin corpus a notable research theme in Croatian literary history.<sup>2</sup> The corpus was, indeed, granted a certain restricted place already from the beginnings of modern literary scholarship in the 1870s and 1880s until the Second World War. The influential older histories of Croatian literature devoted dutiful paragraphs, or entire chapters, to Neo-Latin authors and works.<sup>3</sup> These authors and works were, however, treated with an apparent reserve. They lacked an essential building block of romantically perceived national identity – the national language. Moreover, from the prevailing Crocean viewpoint, the works were considered derivative, insufficiently expressive, insufficiently felt.

Neo-Latin literature is undoubtedly a product of the elite, aimed at the elite. In Croatia, this literature is additionally marked by its close connection not only to the feudal state (as the official language of the Kingdom of Croatia, Latin was used primarily by the nobility and the prelates), but to the Roman Catholic Church as well (many texts from the corpus of Croatian Latin belong to genres of religious literature). For these reasons, it may come as a surprise that the study of Croatian Neo-Latin saw a relative flowering in socialist Yugoslavia, the country whose Communist Party policies after the WWII – in the view of **David Movrin** – "had no use for the classics, a remnant of

---

1 Based on the rough comparison of statistical data from the online bio-bibliography of Croatian Latin authors and works ("CroALaBib," Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, accessed December 13, 2015, [croala.ffzg.unizg.hr/basex](http://croala.ffzg.unizg.hr/basex)) and **Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski**, *Bibliografija hrvatska* (Zagreb 1860, 1863).

2 For a history of Neo-Latin scholarship in Croatia, see **Darko Novaković**, *La filologia neolatina in Croazia (breve bilancio degli ultimi 130 anni)*, Zagreb: Hrvatsko društvo klasičnih filologa, 1997.

3 **Branko Vodnik**, *Povijest hrvatske književnosti I: Od humanizma do potkraj XVIII stoljeća* (Zagreb 1913), 74-78, 312-318; **Mihovil Kombol**, *Povijest hrvatske književnosti do narodnog preporoda* (Zagreb 1945).

the *ancien régime* to be done away with as soon as possible".<sup>4</sup>

## Krleža's Croatian Latin

The key figure in reinventing Croatian neo-Latin literature in socialist Yugoslavia turns out to have been **Miroslav Krleža** (1893-1981), one of the most important and influential Yugoslav and Croatian writers and intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> A prominent leftist and Marxist as well as an influential author, publicist, and cultural commentator between the two world wars (his followers were called "Krležijanci", the Krležians), in 1939 Krleža openly attacked ideologues and Stalinist ideology of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in a scathing pamphlet *Dijalektički antibarbarus* (*A Dialectical Antibarbarus*). Because of the polemic against the party line, although he was a personal friend of **Josip Broz Tito** (1892-1980), the then Secretary General of the Communist Party, Krleža was ostracized by the Communists and forced to wait out the years of the World War Two in Zagreb, in a nerve-racking limbo, threatened by the Nazi puppet regime of the Independent State of Croatia, uncertain of the welcome he would receive among Tito's Partisans if he tried to escape and join them.

After the war, however, as Yugoslavia was being organized as a socialist federation of six national states under the rule of the Communist Party, Tito and the Politburo decided that Krleža was useful enough for all his sins to be forgiven. Krleža's books were reprinted, his plays eagerly performed throughout Yugoslavia; the author himself came to be instrumental in reconstructing – that is, refashioning along the new socialist lines – a number of Croatian cultural institutions, among them the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, one of the oldest learned societies of Southern Slavs, founded in 1866 (under the Ustasha regime 1941-45 it had functioned as the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts).

In this way, although not a policymaker himself, Krleža was placed in a unique position to influence cultural politics of Socialist Yugoslavia. He seems to have attempted to do so already in 1946, when, following Tito's hint about a need to formulate a cultural policy which would be "more open-minded than the one in the Soviet Union,"<sup>6</sup> Krleža submitted to Tito and some other members of the Politburo (**Milovan Đilas**, **Edvard Kardelj**), as well as **Radovan Zogović** of the Agitprop), a position paper ("referat"), on pathways to creating a supranational culture which would go beyond the national to the ideological, overarching and connecting the national cultures rather than eliminating

---

4 David Movrin, "Yugoslavia in 1949 and its *gratiae plenum*: Greek, Latin, and the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform), in *Classics and Communism: Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain*, ed. by György Karsai et al. (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, Budapest: Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study, Warsaw: Faculty of Artes Liberales, 2013), 291.

5 For monographs on Krleža in English and German, see **Ralph Bogert**, *The Writer as Naysayer: Miroslav Krleža and the Aesthetic of Interwar Central Europe* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, Inc, 1991); **Reinhard Lauer**, *Wer ist Miroslav K.? Leben und Werk des kroatischen Klassikers Miroslav Krleža* (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2010).

6 Milovan Đilas on 24 October 1989, quoted in **Enes Čengić**, *S Krležom iz dana u dan (1989-1990): Post mortem II* (Sarajevo: Sijetlost, Zagreb: Mladost, 1990), 199.

them.<sup>7</sup> As Krleža put it, "we are facing various unfinished cultural tasks connected with the politically fully realized plan; acting on five national sectors, we have to develop a program of coordinated and effective cultural and political activity under the banner of Socialist Literature and Art."<sup>8</sup> For Krleža, the first phase of this activity is learning one's history – which requires not only a reconsideration and reappraisal of that history in Socialist and Marxist terms, but also discovering some of its aspects for the first time. Among the preserved action items, Krleža envisions "12. translating Flacius, Ritter, Valvasor, Križanić, Baglivi, Pannonius, Krčelić, Bošković, Tkalec etc. Texts, commentaries, articles on culture and history."<sup>9</sup> Of the authors listed by Krleža, **Matthias Flacius Illyricus** (1520-1575), **Pavao Ritter Vitezović** (1652-1713), **Janez Vajkard Valvasor** (1641-1693), **Juraj Križanić** (1618-1683), **Giorgio Baglivi** (1668-1707), **Janus Pannonius** (1434-1472), **Baltazar Adam Krčelić** (1715-1778), and **Ruder Bošković** (1711-1787) wrote a significant number of their works in Latin.

Krleža describes cultural activity of these authors primarily as progressive resistance in the name of the oppressed masses:

insofar as the problem is formulated by certain people's intellectuals, it is never envisioned along the foreign guidelines. [...] Pannonius is a pamphletist and atheist bishop, peerlessly ridiculing Caesaropapism 200 [sic] years before the Protestant Reformation. Krčelić, a canon, is the emblematic people's thinker of the 18th century, **Van Swieten**'s informer, and the one who put a stop to the last witch trial of Europe. Bošković, a Jesuit, is a mathematician and atomist, the others are grammarians, lexicographers, historians (**Belostenec** and **Jambrešić**); **Kačić** and **Grabovac** (who was murdered) were political poets, **Martinović** was a Jacobin, mathematician, and a republican ideologue whose head was cut off. Flacius produced the first anti-papist church history.<sup>10</sup>

The project has a clear pedagogical intention. It also places Yugoslav culture in a decisively Western European context:

Our new intelligentsia which is just being formed has to have a perspective on the whole of contemporary Western European civilisation, to be able to reference the position of our creativity in space and time. To be able to understand how in these parts books came to be written in range of Turkish artillery.

According to Đilas, Krleža's action programme was not accepted at the time ("it was judged premature as regards our material situation and other circumstances"). But after Tito's break with **Stalin** in 1948, which pushed Yugoslavia out of the Soviet orbit, a new ideological concept appeared, a vision of Yugoslavia as a mediator between East and West. Krleža, the pre-war anti-

---

7 Andrew B. **Wachtel**, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 131.

8 Krleža's position paper, as preserved fragmentarily in Đilas's archive, was published in Čengić, *S Krležom*, 213-218.

9 Čengić, *S Krležom*, 214.

10 Čengić, *S Krležom*, 216.

Stalinist, stepped in to help create not only a "new ideological paradigm" for Yugoslavia, but a new cultural component of Tito's political "third way" as well.<sup>11</sup> Krleža devised and organised an exhibition of Yugoslav medieval art in Paris (*L'art medieval yougoslave*, Palais de Chaillot, March - May 1950), aiming to "demolish prejudice about the Southern Slavs as primitive people outside European culture."<sup>12</sup> Krleža's introductory essay for the exhibition catalogue presented "the contemporary socialist anticipation" as "only the dialectic counterpart of the whole series of our medieval anticipations." Previous cultural manifestations on the territory of Yugoslavia were seen as expressions of the same will and the same tendencies which ultimately had resulted in the Yugoslav socialist revolution.

## Croatian Latin writers at the Yugoslav Academy and in the Yugoslav Encyclopedia

The Paris exhibition, an extravagant and provocative public event, was successful, and encouraged Krleža to explore further avenues. Already in 1949 the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, where Krleža was the vice president from March 1947, had decided to establish a scholarly collection of Croatian Latin writers ("Hrvatski latinisti").<sup>13</sup> In 1951 the first volume in the series went to press. It was an edition and a translation of **Vinko Pribojević**'s oration *De origine successibusque Slavorum* (*On the origin and glory of the Slavs*), originally held in Hvar in 1525, first printed in Venice in 1532. The series continued with a selection from the poems of Janus Pannonius / Ivan Česmički (1952), then with the translation of Krčelić's *chronique scandaleuse* of years 1748-1767 *Annuae sive historia* (1956) and, in the same year, with the book of poems by **Ignjat Đurđević** (originally composed c. 1700-1710). Four years later there followed a selection from Flacius' *Catalogus testium veritatis* (1960), and, after six more years, the 1477 poetry collection *Elegiarum et carminum libri tres* by **Juraj Šižgorić** (1966). After a longer hiatus, a (third) edition of the epic *Davidias* (completed around 1517) by **Marko Marulić** was published in 1974.

11 **Velimir Visković**, "Životopis", in *Krležijana*, ed. by Velimir Visković (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1993), accessed December 13 2015, [krlezijana.lzmk.hr](http://krlezijana.lzmk.hr); **Tanja Zimmermann**, "Introduction", in *Balkan Memories: Media Constructions of National and Transnational History*, ed. by Tanja Zimmermann (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 12-13.

12 Tanja Zimmermann, *Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West: Mediale Bilder und kulturpolitische Prägungen* (Wien: Böhlau, 2013), 232.

13 Formally, the series executive editor was **Nikola Majnarić** (1885-1966), professor at the Department of Classical Philology (from 1925) and member of the Academy from 1949. But Majnarić was a Grecist, and most of the work was done by his junior colleague, **Veljko Gortan** (1907-1985), who was university docent at Majnarić's Department from 1943. Gortan, for whom Croatian Latin was one of the main research interests, edited texts of Pannonius, Đurđević, Šižgorić, and Marulić, translated Pribojević and Krčelić. He became member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1959 (full member in 1965). Both were, of course, considered reliable by the regime (in critical years immediately after the war Majnarić was appointed commissioner of the Ministry of education in 1945 and elected Dean of the Faculty of philosophy at the University of Zagreb in 1946; Gortan was Dean of the same faculty 1960-1962, and vice president of the Academy 1972-1978), but neither was a member of the Communist Party (according to an oral history interview I conducted, the first member of the then League of Communists joined the the Department of Classical Philology only in 1977).

The period 1975-1980 saw publication of the three volumes of the *Bibliotheca Ragusina* by **Saro Crijević** (composed in 1740-1742); in 1978 appeared a selection of epic poetry from the period 1490-1526 by **Jakov Bunić**. The last volume so far was the *De Solis ac Lunae defectibus* by Ruđer Bošković (first edition London, 1760), published in 2007.

As a publishing project, the *Croatian Latin writers* collection is quite uneven. The volumes differ in size and design; some of them present selections, other complete texts; some contain both Latin text and Croatian translation, others only the translation (Krčelić, Flacius), while the *Bibliotheca Ragusina*, a collection of literary biographies from Dubrovnik composed by a Dominican, has only the Latin. The authors and works, however, were carefully chosen. Partly, they had come straight from Krleža's list of rebellious Latin writers, famous critics of Catholic Church and the corrupt feudal elite (Pannonius, Krčelić, Flacius); the other part is of undoubtable importance for the literary and cultural-political canon – Pribojević's speech is the oldest Croatian pan-Slavist text, Đurđević was long recognized as a prominent poet in Croatian language, Šižgorić's incunable is the oldest printed collection of poetry by a Croatian author, Marulić is a national classic as the author of the first epic poem in Croatian language (the *Judita*, 1502, published 1522), whose *Davidias*, a long-forgotten Latin counterpart of *Judita* and preserved in autograph, was a minor sensation when it was finally discovered; Bunić's *De raptu Cerberi* is the only Croatian humanist epic with a theme from Greek mythology, and Bošković was an 18th century Jesuit astronomer and mathematician of world renown who found time and energy to express his scientific ideas in poetic Latin as well.

Croatian Latin authors were assigned a prominent place in another, much larger Yugoslav cultural project conceived by Krleža. In October of 1950, the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia founded the Yugoslav Institute of Lexicography, and Krleža was appointed as its first Director (he was to remain in office to the end of his life). The institute was located in Zagreb, and Krleža got the permission of Tito, Đilas, and Kardelj to engage there a number of non-Communist, bourgeois-liberal scholars and intellectuals, even some of those who in the interwar period belonged to the nationalist-clerical right (most of them had valuable previous experience because they had been part of a similar lexicographic initiative during the World War Two, in the Independent State of Croatia). As the staff members Krleža recruited also opponents in interwar polemics; one of them was **Kruno Krstić** (1905-1987), in 1935 author of the pseudonymous mordant critique of Krleža's use of language *How does Mr M. Krleža write* (in 1950s Krstić's authorship was almost certainly known to Krleža). Krstić was a linguist, historian of philosophy, and psychologist, who graduated in Italian, French, and Latin too. As we shall see, in 1960 and 1962 he will compile two important encyclopedic articles on Croatian Latin.

The main task of the new Institute of Lexicography was to produce a Yugoslav encyclopedia, as

both a more advanced peer to the unfinished *Croatian encyclopedia* from the war years, and a realisation of Krleža's grand 1946 project. The Encyclopedia was intended to reappraise (or construe) Yugoslav history from the socialist viewpoint, as an "affirmative synthesis" and an "accurate and objective presentation of facts" regarding the "enduring continuity of the Southern Slavic civilisation."<sup>14</sup> It was edited by six editorial boards, one in each federative republic, with two additional boards for military history and the history of the Communist Party; the central editorial board included representatives from all republics and republic academies of sciences. In the first plenary session of boards in January 1952 Krleža read another position paper, a keynote speech, published in 1953 as the essay "On certain problems of the Encyclopedia." It presents an expanded and smartened-up version of the rhetoric and arguments that Krleža already had successfully used in the corridors of power. "Our Latinist authors" receive pride of place in the essay, becoming a "vivid example" of challenges that await the Yugoslav Encyclopedia. The "Latinists" appear just before the conclusion. They are highlighted with these words:

To have produced, under the muzzles of Turkish artillery, several hundred renowned painters, writers, builders, strategists, and ideologists, and several hundred Latin writers (more than fifty of which found European-wide fame in their time) – this is not an incident to be glossed over by our Encyclopedia; it has to be shown without pathos, but not without pride. In enumerating problems of this Encyclopedia, let me linger awhile on the case of our Latin writers, because their example testifies vividly to complexities of our task: in many aspects it has to be a pioneering one. Our Latinists, these four centuries of our "Globus intellectualis", had remained extraterritorial in their very nature. The history of our literature covered just a few of them, just the loudest few, and just tangentially, just to rescue them from oblivion, since they, as unknown strangers, were not being studied by anyone. But these Latinists of ours absorb in their writings several thousand classical and West European authors. They are ideologists, strategists, politicians, scholars, economists, technicians, astronomers, poets; they are fanatical historians of their own nation and its problems; they are philologists, grammaticians, dreamers, diplomats, propagandists, and secret agents. At the international level, they stand out not only for the scope of their knowledge, abilities, or poetic gift, for the brilliance of their commitment and dignity of their character; they provide us with an inestimable proof that in our country the common sense of humanity did not capitulate even as the fates had sunk us down to the darkest pit of history.<sup>15</sup>

When Krleža casually drops a Latin phrase coined by **Francis Bacon** (*Descriptio globi intellectualis*, 1612), he hints at his own superior learning, and at the same time also makes the term stand as a metonymy for the whole of Neo-Latin literature and for the encyclopedic project itself (Latin as *the*

14 Miroslav Krleža, "O nekim problemima Enciklopedije," *Republika* IX: 2-3 (1953), 109-132. Cf. also the words (written by Krleža) from the "Introduction" to the Encyclopedia: "Our history makes us proud of a wide range of positive facts: from a series of uprisings for national and social liberation, from the conversion in Carantania to the struggle for the national language in church and state; from Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian, and Montenegrin battles to Bogumils and Uskoks; from the Serbian Uprising to folk poetry and Dubrovnik, from the creation of sovereign states in the 19th century to the fight for unification in the 20th. We are proud of our Republic of Mind and Spirit, which was a cloud of light over the darkness of slavery, leading us to the free socialist country in which Southern Slavic peoples today without hindrance build their own culture and civilisation," "Predgovor I. izdanju Enciklopedije Jugoslavije", *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, 1955).

15 Krleža, "O nekim problemima", 130.

language of knowledge). But Krleža does even more: he *appropriates* Bacon's metaphor for the totality of human knowledge, repurposing it to denote a *national* culture. This rhetorical flourish is characteristic. Equally characteristic is his speaking about "our civilisation", "our Latinists", "our literature", "our literature history", "our *Globus intellectualis*". The ambiguity – whose civilisation? whose Latinists? – was intentional. The terms could have been understood as relating to Yugoslavia as a whole, or to Serbia or Croatia or any of the five federative republics, or even to Socialism and Communism. The hope was that "ours" can denote all these identities *simultaneously*, and that this could lead towards creation of a new supranational universal culture, fully compatible with the flourishing of individual 'national cultures' in a multiethnic country, a culture which could avoid the mistakes of the interwar state-sanctioned unitarism (resented by Yugoslavia's non-Serbian citizens as an attempt to Serbianize the country).<sup>16</sup> Of course, the ambiguity of "ours" – which everyone could interpret to their own liking – was also risky, as the history will show.

Krleža characterizes "our Latin writers" as "in their very nature extraterritorial" (thus explaining why they were "forgotten" both at home and abroad: they belonged to no one, they were unaligned) – they are seen as heralds of a supranationalist culture of internationalist bent, embodying the variety of a unified Yugoslav culture after Krleža's own heart.

Last but not least, Krleža states that in their time these East European Latinists were acknowledged all over Western Europe; acknowledged, it is implied, not out of courtesy or some kind of political correctness *ante litteram*, but because their talents were needed, *ergo* because they were brighter and greater than those from the peaceful, rich, vigorous, cultured and educated Europe herself.

The first volume of the Yugoslav Encyclopedia came out in 1955; the project was completed in 1971. Its fourth volume, published in 1960, included the article "Humanism among the Southern Slavs" by Kruno Krstić (mentioned earlier), on the phenomenon of Renaissance Humanism in the period 1400-1625, mostly in Croatia and Dalmatia (there are two shorter appendices on humanism in Slovenia and Serbia). For the sixth volume, published in 1962, Krstić contributed the article "Latinity among the Southern Slavs", covering the use of Latin on the territory of Yugoslavia (this time there are no separate chapters on nationalities) from the 3rd century BCE until the beginning of the 20th century, when Latin "is still cherished in places as a precious relic and an evocation of the past, as an esoteric language of 'classically' educated circles."<sup>17</sup>

Krleža, who, as the editor-in-chief, read and reviewed everything that interested him, must have touched up Krstić's articles; an echo of the ideas we have already encountered can be heard in the claim that "Although the humanism in our regions, as in other European countries, received

---

<sup>16</sup> Wachtel, *Making*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Kruno Krstić, "Latinitet kod Južnih Slavena", in *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1962), 492.

inspiration from the Appenine Peninsula, it would be wrong to regard our humanism on the whole as a foreign import,"<sup>18</sup> that "our medieval Latin metamorphoses gradually into its Renaissance humanist version, linguistically assimilating classical models, thematically turning to worldly subject matter and ideas (philosophical, historiographical, juridical-sociological) which implicitly or explicitly elude the strict frame of dogma and Church authority,"<sup>19</sup> (Krstić 1962: 481). The emphasis given to figures of victimized rebels and social critics is reminiscent of Krleža too.

## From socialism to nationalism

Krleža's initiative was being taken up by scholars. In 1968–1971 (an appendix will be published in 1982), in another project sponsored by the Yugoslav Academy, Croatian bibliographer **Šime Jurić**, with the assistance of **Dana Čučković** and **Zlatko Herkov**, put out the *Iugoslaviae scriptores Latini recentioris aetatis - Pars I, Opera scriptorum latinorum natione Croatarum usque ad annum MDCCCXLVIII typis edita*, a fundamental scholarly tool which records (in two volumes) bibliographic data on some 5000 works of Croatian Latin writers printed between 1474 and 1848. This Part One was followed in 1972 by the *Pars II. Sloveniae Scriptorum latini recentioris aetatis: Opera scriptorum Latinorum Sloveniae usque ad annum MDCCCXLVIII typis edita*, compiled by **Primož Simoniti**, and much later (in 1982) by the *Pars III. Opera scriptorum Latinorum natione Serborum usque ad annum MDCCCXLVIII typis edita*, prepared by **Vukosava Karanović**, edited by **Slavko Gavrilović**.

For all intents and purposes an objective scholarly product of basic research, the three-part bibliography of Yugoslav Latin writers nevertheless lent itself to precarious comparisons. The two volumes of Croatian bibliography comprised almost 1000 pages (with additional 200 of the 1982 *Additamentum*), while the Slovenian *Pars II* had 182, and the Serbian *Pars III* mere 77 pages. Jurić's "Introduction" to *Pars I*, written in Latin, first repeats some motifs known from Krleža's texts ("Quamquam brevi toti nationi Croaticae ter quaterve saeculis diuturna et gravissima bella cum Turcis gerenda erant, maiores nostri nec inter arma commercium cum Ciceronis lingua intermiserunt"<sup>20</sup>). But when he mentions "our countrymen who used Latin and spent the better part of their lives in other regions of Europe, having done little for their homeland", the bibliographer introduces polemical tones from a noticeably different register:

cum plurimi eorum acerrimi ingenii essent litterisque ac studiis impigram operam navarent, tantam apud exteris nationes famam sibi conciliaverunt, ut patriae suae

18 Krsto Krstić, "Humanizam kod Južnih Slavena", in *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod FNRJ, 1960), 288.

19 Krstić, "Latinitet", 481.

20 Šime Jurić, "Praefatio", in *Iugoslaviae scriptores Latini recentioris aetatis - Pars I, Opera scriptorum latinorum natione Croatarum usque ad annum MDCCCXLVIII typis edita* (Zagrabiae : Institutum historicum academiae scientiarum et artium slavorum meridionalium, 1968), V.



gloriam non parum auxerint. Inter hos nostros linguae Latinae cultores multi ardentissimo patriae amore enituerunt. (...) Haec idcirco silentio praetermittenda non censui, quod sunt quidam exteri viri, litteris et rebus politicis dediti, qui singulare studium linguae Latinae apud maiores nostros perverse interpretari non desinunt.<sup>21</sup>  
(Jurić VI)

We are not told who those "foreign authors and politicians" are, much in the way Krleža does not tell who are "we" the Latinists belong to. But the *patria* in Jurić's preface is undoubtedly Croatia; in his whole text Yugoslavia is mentioned only as part of the title of the (planned, but never realised) *Yugoslav Dictionary of Early Modern Latin*: "quod studiosis Lexico latinitatis recentioris aetatis Iugoslaviae condendo vacantibus inserviret."

The changing political climate in Yugoslavia left its mark – faint, but discernible – on the other important contribution to Croatian Latin studies as well. In parallel to Jurić's bibliography, the years 1969-1970 saw publication of the first comprehensive anthology of Latin writing in Croatia. Under the already familiar title of *Croatian Latinists (Hrvatski latinisti - Croatici auctores qui Latine scripserunt)*, editors Veljko Gortan (whom we have already met as the editor and translator of *Croatian Latin*) and his younger colleague **Vladimir Vratović** (1927-2014), both professors at the Department of Classical Philology of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb (Gortan was then also full member of the Academy), brought out, in two volumes, more than 1700 pages of selections from Croatian Latin ranging from the Middle Ages to 1830. The selections were both in Latin and in Croatian, with brief introductory notes on each author (enriched by basic bibliographies of primary and secondary works).

The anthology had a general introduction "The Basic Characteristics of Croatian Latinity", co-authored by Gortan and Vratović, which was also published in English, in the volume 20 (1971) of the influential international journal of Neo-Latin studies *Humanistica Lovaniensia*.<sup>22</sup>

*Croatian Latinists* appeared at the highly symbolic position of the second title in the series *Five Centuries of Croatian Literature (Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti)*; the first volume presented Croatian medieval literature in Croatian language). The series was started in 1962,<sup>23</sup> not by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, but by the major Croatian cultural society *Matica hrvatska*. In the eyes of a cultural historian from the outside, the aim of the series "was undoubtedly to raise Croatian national pride at the imposing sight of several yards worth of national literature."<sup>24</sup> Intellectuals grouped around the *Matica* acted as the most determined supporters of Croatian separatist ethnic national feelings.

---

21 Jurić, "Praefatio", VI.

22 This was only a part of the extensive international promotion of Croatian Latin that Gortan and Vratović, with a few other Croatian Neo-Latin scholars, undertook in years 1971-1980.

23 The series eventually comprised 180 volumes; the last one was published in 1995.

24 Wachtel, *Matica*, 185.

Gortan and Vratović themselves, however, were primarily scholars; their survey of Croatian Latin is a careful and restrained text. Contrary to Krleža's verbal pyrotechnics, they approach the subject coolly and considerately, analysing the body of Croatian Latin literature "by numbers" – by its social function, by its spatial and temporal distribution, by its generic and stylistic features. Only the comparison with Krleža's programmatic essays brings out the differences. They are more in what is *not* said. Just like Jurić, Gortan and Vratović mention Yugoslavia only once in the name of the Academy of Sciences and Arts. The anthology editors do not avoid the rebellious aspect of Latin writers' careers (calling it their "more radical thought"), but this aspect is mostly downplayed; Gortan and Vratović do not in any way single out e. g. Janus Pannonius' "peerless ridicule of Caesaropapism", or the polemical and anti-Catholic dimension of Flacius' activity; even Pribojević's pan-Slavism is deemphasized into merely "extolling the Slavs". Much of the editors' attention goes to Croatian authors which had fit well into the establishment of their time, especially into the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. True, some of the introductory statements of Gortan and Vratović may have been inspired by Krleža's viewpoint of Croatian Latin as the proto-socialist *littérature engagée*,<sup>25</sup> but the overtones of their central claim undoubtedly diverge:

It is no exaggeration to say, therefore, that of all the Slav nations, the Croats had the richest and aesthetically the most valuable humanistic literature in Latin.<sup>26</sup>

Latin literature is, in the full sense of the word, European literature. Consequently, Croatian literature in Latin, despite its specific characteristics, is an integral part of it. In its various phases it was subject to the same process of borrowing and lending of themes, subjects and stylistic procedures which can be found in any developed literature. In this feature, too, the Croats were a part of European culture. There is none among small nations, and very few among the big ones (not one in Slavonic nations) which equals the Croats in their important and abundant contribution to European literature in Latin.<sup>27</sup>

Here Yugoslavia is bypassed completely. Through its Latin writings, Croatia becomes an integral – and distinguished – part of Europe; its integration occurs directly, without intermediaries. The very movement of integration (Croatia assimilated into Europe) is conceptualized contrary to the movement imagined by Krleža in 1952-1953, whose ("extraterritorial") Latinists *absorb* "several thousand classical and West European authors" (Europe assimilated into "our country"). Another point which would have been very dear to Krleža in the 1950s – the *specific characteristics* of

---

25 E. g. "Nurtured on the soil of Antiquity, the tradition of the latin language was reflected in literature in an ever present desire to express, in the international language of the European 'literary republic', not only general subjects, but also feelings and thoughts closely linked with the native soil. Latinists from different parts of Croatia found their inspiration in the reality of their native land, in the petty passions of the everyday life as well as in loftier patriotic enthusiasm and the bitter realization of the hard fate of their country," Veljko Gortan, Vladimir Vratović, and Jozef IJsewijn, "The Basic Characteristics of Croatian Latinity", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 20 (1971), 37-68; 38.

26 Gortan, Vratović, IJsewijn, "The Basic Characteristics", 42.

27 Gortan, Vratović, IJsewijn, "The Basic Characteristics", 63.

national use of Latin – is in 1969 suggested to be a potential *obstacle* to integrating Croatian Latin literature into the European corpus, an obstacle which had been successfully overcome ("despite its specific characteristics").

Thus, a change had come about. Croatian Latin, in the 1950s presented as an intellectual historical anticipation of the Yugoslav "third way", was in the 1970s being appropriated by the Croatian nationalist movement, testifying to the nation's right to exist *on par* with other European nations.

## The 1980s endgame

Brought about by the more liberal climate in Yugoslavia after 1966, as well as by gradual collapse of a belief in any form of Yugoslav culture among significant portions of the cultural elites, Croatian separatism, known as the "Mass Movement", or the "Croatian Spring", was, after a few uncertain months, officially crushed in December 1971. Tito's decision was to remove the Croatian party leadership (because of its "liberalist-technocrat deviation"), and tens of thousands of Croats were eventually punished in one way or another for their "nationalist euphoria". Aiming, however, to undercut the popular bases of the nationalists by granting many of the nationalist demands, the Yugoslav government did not work especially hard to change the orientation in the cultural sphere. Thus, many cultural initiatives – among them the *Five centuries of Croatian literature* as well as the Academy editions of the *Croatian Latin writers* and the Neo-Latin bibliography – were continued with little or no interruption, some even gaining new momentum and appreciation. Indicative are the highest award of the Socialist Republic of Croatia for humanities research "Božidar Adžija", which was in 1972 given out to Gortan and Vratović "for the outstanding scholarly work *Croatian Latinists*,"<sup>28</sup> and founding of the first Chair of Croatian Latin at the Department of Classical Philology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb (1982); the first professor at the Chair was Vladimir Vratović.

The uninterrupted cultural activity led also to Croatian Latin writers being accepted not only as themes of scholarly research, but as subjects of popular imagination. Two examples will suffice. In 1979, the adventurous TV journalist and author **Krešo Novosel** (1926-2008) persuaded the publishing house *Globus* (Zagreb) to produce a cycle of six biographical novels on Croatian humanists, all of whom found fame and career abroad (Janus Pannonius and his uncle **Ivan Vitez**, **Antun Vrančić**, **Nikola Modruški**, **Fran Trankvil Andreis**, **Vinko Paletin**); two of the novels were authored by Novosel himself, the other four by moonlighting university professors. In the same year, the future eminent writer **Ivan Aralica** (born 1930, in the 1990s a favourite of **Franjo Tuđman**, the first president of the Republic of Croatia) published his first novel that attracted attention of the

---

28 "Obrazloženja znanstvenog doprinosa za nagrađene znanstvenike državnom nagradom za znanstvenoistraživački rad za 1972. godinu", Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, accessed December 13, 2015, public.mzos.hr.

Yugoslav public, *Psi u trgovištu (Dogs in a Bazaar)*. A paragon of Croatian new wave historiographical fiction, the novel describes historical fatum of Croats caught in the clash of civilizations, between the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary, and the Venetian Republic; one of the main characters in Aralica's novel is Antun Vrančić, a hero of a novel from Novosel's series.

## Dichtung und Wahrheit

When Krleža was envisioning a new Yugoslav common culture in 1946-1952, why did he insist on including Croatian Latin into it? In retrospective, he must have known how easy it would be to reestablish the connection between Latin and the Church, how small a shift of emphasis was required to present the group of intellectuals under research as Croats first, and everything else later. Krleža must have known he was playing with fire.

Part of the explanation is undoubtedly personal. Krleža had been attracted to certain Neo-Latin cultural figures already in the interwar period and during the war. The 1936 quadricentennial of **Erasmus of Rotterdam**'s death turned Krleža's attention towards the most famous of Neo-Latin writers, to whom the Croatian author returned amidst the resignation and depression of 1942, and again in 1952 (at the height of Stalin's anti-Titoist drive movement, embodied in trials of **László Rajk** in Budapest and **Rudolf Slánský** in Prague<sup>29</sup>); it is also telling that Krleža will name his crucial anti-Stalinist text from 1939 *The Dialectical Antibarbarus*, while Erasmus's early satirical dialogue in defence the utility of the pagan classics bore the title of *Antibarbarorum liber*. In 1938, again, **Mijo Mirković** (1898-1963), one of the "Krležians" who would not renounce his friend even after the *Antibarbarus*, had published a polemical book-length biographical essay *Flacius* (its first version was written in 1934 for Krleža's journal *Danas*), suggestively painting life of Matthias Flacius Illyricus, Mirković's countryman from Istria, as "spent in an amazing unflinching battle for the victory of reason from the birth in the white heat of stony hills around Labin to the end in a dark convent of the White Ladies, in a city which will later see the birth of **Goethe**."<sup>30</sup> Finally, in the same 1942, the year of the essay on Erasmus, Krleža must have written the first version of the essay on Janus Pannonius (the newspaper version published in 1955 is presented as "a fragment from the October 1942 manuscript"), where the humanist poet and failed conspirator against **Matthias Corvinus** is seen as a point on the "heretical continuum of this region."<sup>31</sup> An outcast from the left and a sworn enemy of the right could well identify with a gallery of brilliant intellectuals – what is

---

29 Krleža wrote the essay "O Erazmu Rotterdamskom" in 1942, and published it in *Republika* 1 (1953), 1-31. See **Stanko Lasić**, "Tri moderna pogleda na Erazma Rotterdamskog: **Huizinga**, **Zweig**, Krleža", in *Gordogan* 19 (1985), 212-217.

30 Mijo Mirković, *Flacius* (Zagreb: Hrvatska naklada, 1938), 24.

31 Miroslav Krleža, "O pojavi Jana Panonija", *Vjesnik*, October 28, 1955.

Latin but the quintessential language of intellectuals? – who belong nowhere (Krlježa's "exterritoriality") and are persecuted everywhere.

Moreover, Krlježa found Croatian Latin writers occupying an ideological vacuum of a kind. As I have mentioned, they have been researched and included in histories of national literature, but Croatian Neo-Latin studies languished after 1918. The interwar Yugoslavia, which officially considered the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as "tribes" of a single nation and promoted a strong national state with a unified national (high) culture, was unsympathetic to Croatian Latin and would not endorse study of writers which did not use the national language.<sup>32</sup> But the disadvantaged state of research meant also that the important cultural figures of Croatian Latin remained underinterpreted; for a creative mind, filling their vague outlines with colors and details of one's own liking was an easy, welcome, and inspiring exercise (with the additional thrill of discovering and displaying many things that nobody else had seen for a long time).<sup>33</sup>

The inherent risk of such an (essentially poetic) approach to cultural politics was that, once the real scholarly investigations start taking place, the facts will not fit the model. This is what, I believe, happened in the 1970s. A more detailed survey of Croatian Latin was carried out, and it demonstrated that the "several hundred" authors – today we know we should speak of some two thousand names – cannot all have been progressive, heretical intellectuals. An inquiry aiming at objectivity demanded that something be said about the less heretical authors too, and the sheer numbers of them (with the 1970s *Zeitgeist* to boot) tipped the scale, not to mention the fact that some features which at the first glance seemed characteristic may have turned out to be not so important, or to require a different explanation.

This is not to say that the "nationalist" representation of Croatian Latin is the "right one". It is subject to criticism and reinterpretation in the same way as the "supranationalist" image of it had been reinterpreted. The criticism of the nationalist representation, however, remains to be undertaken. It is to be hoped only that it will not have to be carried out in a tacit and implicit way, as the *mores et tempora* required that Gortan and Vratović proceed when they reinterpreted Krlježa's Latinists.

---

32 Croatian writers in non-national language were actually grist to the mill of cultural colonialism. The interwar years saw energetic action of Dalmatian Italian intellectuals (according to the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo, a large part of ethnically mixed Dalmatia was assigned to Italy) to claim for Italian culture as much Dalmatian cultural heritage as possible. In their view, the use of Latin was a strong argument for Italian identity, or at least a proof of belonging to Italian cultural sphere.

33 At the height of his creative powers, Krlježa had already shown skill at exploring the roads not taken and picking up subtle hints. In 1936 he wrote and published one of his masterworks, *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* (*Balade Petrice Kerempuha*) not in the standard Croatian language, but in its Kajkavian dialect. Krlježa thus reinvented Croatian dialectal poetry, using it for discourse of suffering and injustice, for speaking "of the people and for the people", and demonstrating its unsuspected political possibilities. There were 20<sup>th</sup> century Croatian dialectal poets before Krlježa, but their poems did not have a strong social note, nor were they strongly anchored in a specific vision of history.