

the work of miroslav krleža

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Miroslav Krleža, poet and man of thought, novelist, essayist, playwright, chronicler and polemicist, encyclopedist and polyhistor, theoretician and revolutionary, the founder of a literary epoch in which, within the scope of the Croatian and Yugoslav intellectual and historical context, aesthetic and ideologic criteria were elevated to the highest creative levels, died in Zagreb on 29th December 1981. Krleža's versatility and creativeness resembles the great masters of the Renaissance. His erudition and power to fascinate seemed to be limitless. The only factual obstacle to restrict his spirit was the limited range of the language, he worked with. Had he written and spoken in any of the leading languages of the world, the courses of thought throughout the entire globe would today be more critical than they are now, so inspiring was the power of his pen and so great his ability to identify deceit and, in the continuous struggle against ignorance, madness and lies, to critically enlighten the problems of man's individual and collective existence.

With the irresistibility of his poetics and argumentation, Miroslav Krleža influenced the mind and conscience to such an extent that he simply could not be rebuffed. Although universal ethnical imperatives were the fundament and essence of his engagement, his brilliant dialectic explications were primarily based on the human and historical experiences of the Panonian-Lower Danubian-Adriatic regions, and the focus of his literary and philosophic interest was the national and class essence of the Croatian people and its close connection with the other South Slavic peoples. Immersed in the reality of his soil, he, as a free thinker, was continually in dispute with the dogmas of Europe's class civilization and the entire system of violence and falsehoods that characterize it and grant it. Therefore his opus is a permanent, exciting and lucid dialogue with the sum total of the criminality of the European past and present and is masterly conceived in behalf of the tragic empiricism of those who have for centuries been living through the drama of the oppressed.

Krleža's literary clash with the falsehoods of our century lasted almost seventy years, and any objective comparative analysis will show that the work of this writer, although written in the language of a small nation, belongs at the very top of European and world literature. »We are grateful to Krleža for knowing as much as he knows and for having undertaken to create one of the greatest works of our century«, said Jean Cassou on one occasion, emphasizing that the books of this »amazing writer« have never ceased to arouse his enthusiasm. Cassou added that Krleža's enthusiasm. Cassou added that imagination and passion, pulsating joy, irresistible tragicomic force«. Many other arbiters from abroad thought of Krleža in a similar fashion, but the majority of the critical intellects of the world did not get to know him, owing to the language barrier. It is however true that the number of Krleža's translated works is far from small.

More than 150 editions of his works have been published in some forty foreign languages.

ges (see the bibliography on his translated works in »THE BRIDGE« 1981/3, but a relatively small number of Krleža's books have appeared in the major languages of the western hemisphere. This is the result of the traditionally depreciatory attitude of the former colonial powers towards the cultures of small nations, as well as reflection of the specific difficulties that are bound to occur when translating Krleža. An adequate conveyance of Krleža's idiom into another linguistic medium, a conveyance which would at least to a certain extent retain all the pulsations, poesy and persuasibility of the original, requires exceptional effort and talent. The translation of the fascinating power of Krleža's sentences is a first-class creative task which even some of the best translators fail to accomplish. Therefore one cannot expect, for instance, the Anglosaxon or Romanic nations to get to know Krleža soon and without difficulty, but it is also obvious that a work of this significance, volume and value as is Krleža's must sooner or later become a living segment of spiritual permeation wherever there is a wish to apprehend and accept the top values. Jean Paul Sartre was evidently surprised by the works of Krleža; he said that this great writer had anticipated existentialism and that he, Sartre, from fear of becoming a plagiarist, would not have written a great deal of his own works had he previously known Krleža's.

Who, then, is Krleža, for many an obvious enigma in the European literature of the 20th century?

Indeed it is far from easy to introduce him to those who have no knowledge of the millennial history and human drama of his people and the other small nations that make up the Yugoslavia of today. Krleža reminds us of the tremendous spiritual eruption which arose from the essence of that drama in which the human problem, many centuries ago, sprouted from the Glagolic and Manichaic catharsis, which in our times reflected itself in the gigantic movement of the masses who, with their own strength, resolutely settled the problem of freedom. In Krleža's per-

ception — implicitly — there is the compressed heritage of free European thought which lead from the hermeneutic and structuralistic seeds of Erasmus and Flacius to Schopenhauer, Marx and Heidegger, but the splendour of his poetics is composed on authentic material which, even when upgraded to the level of universal value, remains specific, challenging, and perhaps even incomparable. Herein lies Krleža's advantage, but perhaps also the impediments to a simple and easy perception of his work in foreign cultural domains through the use of simplified marketing and consumer laws. The very fact that Miroslav Krleža was never awarded the Nobel Prize in the field of literature means only that the elite of the Swedish Academy failed to pass their exam of intellectual maturity when confronted with Krleža's work.

Miroslav Krleža was born in 1893 in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, which was at that time a subjugated country in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His first literary works, published in 1914, at a time when the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary initiated World War I by attacking Serbia, already announced the appearance of a writer of Promethean temperament and unusual imagination in Croatian literature. His first literary works were plays that were so outstandingly expressive that even after seven decades they may be considered as avantgarde. In them we meet a demolisher of all former conventions, a writer of intense talent who has taken upon himself, through the help of literature, to radically change the world. But his earliest literary works show that his literary formula is not a slave to the aprioristic idea. The idea not use art as a simple means of expression but appears as its indispensable and inherent dialectical form, as an integral without which any idecative act in literature is futile. This formula, in which the so-called tendency is in fact subordinate to the essence of art because it is extremely poeticized and entirely freed of its own vulgarity, is to remain a constant which will, in all the coming historical and existential situations and in spite of pressu-

his opposition to art for art's sake, Krljeza never gave up the idea that «the poem is a silver toy in the hands of late centuries» and that, in this great play of poetry, «the moon-light can also be a view of the world» (novel *On the Edge of Reason*, 1938). These would be the basic guidelines for comprehending the scope, meaning and character of Krljeza's poetical engagement and his literary instrument-tation, which brought him into conflict with the views then predominant among the literary left in Yugoslavia.

In 1917 and 1918, Miroslav Krljeza published four books of poems and a book of dramas. His literary beginnings resemble an erupting volcano, but this volcano never stopped erupting. In 1919 and 1920, he published three books. The first great synthesis of his creativity, the war novellas in *The Croatian God Mars*, appeared in 1922; this work is at the very top of world literature with themes. The force and profundity of his idiom, the means of his poetics based on an inimitable permeation of the dramatic and the lyric, and the refined realistic feeling of humanness rid of all aprioristic suppositions make Krljeza's *The Croatian God Mars* an impressive and original picture of human destinies in the slaughterhouse of war; indeed, the entire artistic impression of his war prose is unique in modern literature. In *The Croatian God Mars*, it is already clear that Krljeza's philosophy and theoretical determination are not factors which can in any way become a burden or a limitation to his art. Although he supported tendency in the arts, he never allowed the dignity of a work of literature to be affected by vulgarization; for this reason, his anti-war messages in *The Croatian God Mars* seem as if they are not a subject of the writer's program but rather an integral part of the poetics of the work itself, its artistic and humanistic essence.

From initial symbolism and tendency towards the spectacular, Krljeza very soon forwarded his remarkable realistic idiom in which the influences of prevailing literary trends could not be found. He also set up his own

res and dangers, characterize Krljeza's entire relationship towards literature. When viewed from this angle, we see that Krljeza's first step in literature marked him as an anti-dogmatic and authentic artist who, in the creative (and intellectual) act, refuses to yield to prejudices and myths, nor to the limitations forced upon him by his own ideas. He was sensitive towards deceptions and, as a free thinker, he managed to overcome all the traps of metaphysics, even the most hidden ones, with his creative dialecticism. All this meant that the Croatian literary scene witnessed the appearance of an original revolutionary for whom the revolutionary alternative imposed itself upon him directly, in other words, not as a doctrine but from his own youthful experience of the reality around him. He found new impulses for his revolutionary ideas in the great military massacre of 1914—1918, and it is only logical that a spirit such as his would, after the October Revolution of 1917, commit itself to Lenin's concept. In it, young Krljeza saw the possibility for his country, through a social and national revolution, to finally rid itself of all the class chains and bonds and to be free from foreign imperialistic domination. Perceiving the final victory of reason and humanness in Lenin's formula, Krljeza expressed his vision of this through poetries which were not a mere mechanical or doctrinaire acceptance of revolutionary ideas. Krljeza did not attach himself to Leninism but belonged to it of his own imagination, relying on the humanistic and revolutionary synthesis of his own country. This predilection was a logical link with his expressionism, which was the passionate revolt of a freedom-loving and individual against all social chains, ignorance and fanaticisms. A particularly creative interdependence between the literary and ideological motives is already eloquent in his book *Excursion to Russia* (1926) in which one easily recognizes Krljeza's propensity for the power of the written word, rather than for pragmatism, and this remains his elementary point of departure in the act of creation. In spite of his true belief in the revolution and

»Krlježian« sentence which, particularly in his essays, embodied an extraordinary power of enchantment. The poetic, dramatic and narrative structure of the sentence is actually unpredictable; in it the idea does not arise only from the meanings of the words; but the unusual pulsations of the clauses within the sentence structure, in mutual rhythmical and dialectical conditioning, not only perform with their own contextual magma an appropriate poetic tension and atmosphere, but also serve as a method of suggestively building up an idea which the author acknowledges after having exposed it to all the dangers of negation. Krlježa's expression is self-contained and outstanding to such an extent that it is impossible to compare it or substitute it with that of any other writer.

To analyze and fully explain Krlježa's literary opus is a very complex problem. His work reflects the historical fate of his country, and especially of his time, but in doing so the regional and historical scopes do not limit the sphere of his thematic interest. This sphere includes areas of varying levels and borders. It may be said of Krlježa that he is the writer of the millennial destiny of Croatia and of the most turbulent revolutionary epoch in the life of its people, all aspects of which can be found in his works. However, this great epoch, of which he was a part, linked his opus to all the spiritual movements in Yugoslavia and therefore, in light of the subject matter he dealt with and the political and theoretical interests reflected in his work, Krlježa is not only a Croatian writer but a Yugoslav writer as well. But the thematic sphere of Krlježa's opus expands to yet much broader scopes. He is also an authentic writer of the Panonian and Lower Danubian regions, a writer recognized by Hungarians as if he were one of their own. Krlježa resembles a phoenix who, from the ashes of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, rose in permanent search of the sources of its inspiration in the totality of the problems of Central Europe. However the sphere of his subject matter does not stop here either.

After the fall of Austria-Hungary, Croatia became a constituent part of the newly founded Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a reactionary state formation, accompanied by social crisis and national oppression, in which the masses were deprived of all democratic and human rights. Supported by police violence and primitive and corrupt government representatives, the regime was brutal in its dealings with freedom-loving ideas, especially with the activities of the illegal Communist Party, one of whose theoreticians and founders was Miroslav Krlježa. But Krlježa changed his role of member of the political underground for the role of the writer who, without renouncing his ideas, influences public opinion comes into conflict with the censors as well as undergoing numerous other troubles and difficulties. Aware that the greatest truths of Europe were uttered under the gallows, in the souls of men who refused to flinch in the face of violence but preferred to defy danger, Krlježa, in the obscurity of police repression and in spite of all the difficulties, wrote fervently and in abundance. From initial symbolism and an inclination towards the spectacular («... I entered the scene with burning trains, with piles of corpses, gallows, ghosts and action of all sorts: whole ships would sink, churches and cathedrals would topple, the plots would unwind on thirty-thousand ton battleships, whole regiments would be shooting, dying was done in masses...»), he very soon formed his singular Krlježian realistic style, his vibrant idiom which, like some magic formula, irresistibly captivated his readers.

Although a large library could be filled with the books written about the work of Miroslav Krlježa in the form of essays, analytical studies, critical reviews and monographies, his poetics have remained an enigma which it is impossible to explain rationally. Perhaps we will come nearest to the essence of Krlježa's idiom if we say that the emotional intensity in him, especially in his essays, is founded on the perpetually dramatic conflicts between the thesis and anti-thesis wherein destruction

and negation become the basis of the analysis and the poetics. In other words, Krleža tries to reach the truth by an all-inclusive and intense attack on falsehood, and this general attack, in front of which all the myths, deceptions, sacrosanct notions and entire systems of human corruption and stupidity turn into dust and ashes, is full of a lucid, brilliant dialecticism of a mind that emits delicate, irresistibly lyrical emotions and the intimate, human vulnerability of a great destroyer. In the expanses of Krleža's idiom, behind a very rich baroque avalanche of words, with which the writer creates an exceptionally poetic atmosphere, a certain scepticism, an anti-dogmatic questioning, something which gives the whole expression a truly human dimension, seems to keep recurring in all his writings. And that is raised to a level of critical realism which possesses the magic to captivate, so that even the greatest theoretical and political opponents of Miroslav Krleža always acknowledge his ingeniousness. But when we speak of the basic ideative determinants of his poetics, we must say that Krleža observes the civilization of violence from the empirical and human depths of another civilization, the one that, since Manichean times to the times of the modern revolutions, is penetrated by a genesis of revolt and free thought in which the entire suffering drama of the world could be condensed. It is as if Krleža opened all the craters of these accumulated energies of the human spirit through which endless avalanches of human emotion and reason penetrate. He thus built an entirely new philosophy of history and an entirely original aestheticism. »If anybody in front of the tribunal of European history has the right to spit civilization in the face, we have!« — wrote Krleža in one of his essays. However, with all that we have said so far, we have not yet illustrated the entire range of Krleža's idiom. It moves in a widely nuanced arc from the most refined lyrical meditations to states of the most dramatic condensations, and the striving for innovation is always present in his so-called method. For this reason, Krleža never lagged

behind the times and his work could never be enclosed within a single-minded thematic and aesthetic structure as is the case with the majority of writers. The aesthetic and meditative circles of his creativity were always opened anew.

While we can say of the war novellas in *The Croatian God Mars* that they represent a direct and profound realistic picture of actual situations and relationships, an inspiring portrayal of human destinies and psyches that really existed and which the writer ennobled with his remarkable and refined sensitivity for actual human happenings, in his famous drama and prose cycle *The Glembay Family*, which is one of his peak achievements, Krleža uses a completely different method. In this cycle, he sublimated the deep moral crisis and decadence of a parasitic segment of society who, in the shadow of the imperialistic »Drang nach Osten« policy and general class and military violence, built up their own middle class-aristocratic prestige, their specific lifestyle and social influence. But although the Glembays are composed extremely realistically, so that they give an impression of maximum authenticity, they are primarily a literary fiction and are not based on any actual model. In *The Glembays*, reality is so transposed that the author's creation cannot in any way be coordinated with a life chronicle. As in the greatest part of Krleža's works, the method used in *The Glembays* is consistently anti-veristic, but just because of this, with an original and inspired combination of induction and deduction, he managed to create an aesthetic complex whose truly creative realism raises reality to the level of a great synthesis that develops into a symbol.

The basis of the Glembay cycle consists of three dramas — *The Glembay Family*, *Leda* and *In Agony* — which, in the opus of dramas by this author (*Kraljevo*, *Galicia*, *The Wolf*, *Golgotha*, *Aretaios*), represent in many respects a specific literary and aesthetic novelty. Merging with the tradition of the European drama, and especially Chekhov and Ibsen, Krleža took a significant step forward in acknow-

ledging the modern realistic sensitivity on the stage. The main plot in Krleža's drama arises from character psychology and from the clashes between human fates which bear in themselves all the conflicting impulses. Thus, similar to Ibsen, Krleža brought the modern drama to Shakespearean positions, but with the difference that Krleža's characters possess authentically intrinsic components that Ibsen never managed to reach: the spirit and essence of the time, the atmosphere and the dialectics of the real.

Krleža's dramatic opus is not uniform in the sense of its dramaturgical structure. His youthful expressionistic dramas written between 1914 and 1918 (*Legend, Masquerade, Kraljevo, Christopher Columbus, Michelangelo Buonarroti*), are conceived as unconventional stage plays charged with dramatic and poetic elements in which the power of symbols and visions, as well as the global conflicts of ideas, substitute the refined psychological determinants of the individual. Not being adaptable to the middle-class theatre of that time, these dramas had to wait about forty years to be performed, and today they may be included among the best texts in contemporary European theatrical literature. Krleža's last drama, *Aretaios* (1959), surmounts time and space in a totally unconventional manner; he synthesizes the main characteristics of his previous cycles, transforming them into a new quality, and creates a work of great suggestive force whose bold dramaturgy opens up new perspectives for the modern theatre.

In his novellas of the twenties, Krleža fixes his attention on war and post-war motif, affirming himself as an extraordinary storyteller, to again reach a peak in narrative creativity in his novel *The Return of Philip Lativovicz* (1932). In this book, where Krleža uses an amazingly condensed realism, he probes the destiny of the Croatian province, its corruption and the agony of living in it. Surrounded by general provincial lethargy, masterfully and passionately portrayed, the main character stands like a drowning person, the strength of his spirit helpless. Drowning is

inevitable here and it becomes the main plot of the novel, in which the close-knit novelistic currents remind us of an authentic existentialistic drama. And although we cannot say that Krleža was under any direct influence of Heidegger, this novel anticipates existentialism in the European literature of the 20th century (Sartre's *Nausea* appeared in 1938).

Among Krleža's other novels, his *Banquet in Blitva* is of particular significance. In it, engrossed in the problem of modern political tyranny and the crisis of middle-class political conceptions in the Europe of our times. However, Krleža reaches his creative climax in his last novel, *The Banners*, which was published in five books during his lifetime, while the sixth remained in manuscript form. »The Banners« is a grandiose novelistic fresco on the existential and political situations of the Lower Danubian, Balkan and Central European areas that are branded and pursued by the huge entanglement of opposites and turning points which brought about the fall of Austria-Hungary and the unfolding of new social and historical dramas in that part of the world. The perceptive force and irresistible attraction of Krleža's critical realism, as well as the author's mastery in creating characters and situations, in a complex projecting and linking of various opposing currents of the plot that interlock and flow like big rivers, classifies this novel among the most intricate creations in world literature, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. *The Banners* has not yet been subjected to thorough evaluation. This gigantic work, this great novel about political doctrines and political destinies through which almost all the coordinates of newer Croatian and South Slavic history are refracted, calls for an aesthetic and comparative literary analysis which requires great effort and knowledge; it will take some time before conditions are ready for determining its real worth within the scope of contemporary European literature.

The development of Krleža's versification began with the publishing of his *Afternoon Symphony* in 1916, running on uninter-

tedly to the appearance of *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* in 1936, which the critics unanimously applauded as the greatest poetic work of Croatian and all the other Yugoslav literatures. *Poems in the Dark* came out as a book after the *Ballads*, but was written before they were, thus it may be said that Krleža's prosody, contained in eleven books and prolific in intonations and all sorts of forms, progressed in a creative crescendo for a period of about twenty years.

Krleža's poetic trip began with his expressionistic poems in which the rebel, the optimist and Messiah, the admirer of grandeur and beauty, plays on the titanic keyboard. And everything is then in a colossal, universal exaltation where even clouds «kiss and embrace, caress and fondle, like ideas for sunny ecstasies». From the passionate, symbolistic, even hallucinatory and dramatic urge to change the world, to start a revolution, this poetry of anger, defiance and the greatness of man, when from the burning pores and «gushing sparks of a dragon's nostrils» everything thunders and glows, gradually calms down, reaching heights of lyrical refinement of incredible tenderness. But the suggestiveness of Krleža's contemplative verse, which is in itself a literary testimony of the spiritual drama that permeated an entire epoch has remained almost totally unstudied and unknown in spite of its exceptional worth since it has been overshadowed by *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* which are, no doubt, the most consistent poetic work of 20th century European literature.

The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh are written in the old, non-standardized language of Croatian literature, the language of public literature which was used by the courts, the administrative apparatus and in the literary productions of the 17th and early 18th century, and which is today only a folk dialect variant. The subject matter of the ballads is the wretched history of a people, the great drama of the deprived, the destiny of those who

have for centuries been dying in the gory, hopeless darkness of the feudal civilization and tyranny in general.

If the only point at issue was the subject matter, *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* would not be considered an exceptional literary novelty. But their miraculous poetical value is the result of the poet's imagination which in this case seems to be without precedent in the literature of our day. An aesthetic literary analysis of this work leads us to interesting conclusions. In the subject matter that the poet works on, he creates an entirely original correlation between the elements of inspiration and expression. A characteristic of his method is the fact that he does not speak of the serfdom and plebeian drama of his people from a historical and perspective distance, but from the empirical core of that history itself, from the human depths of the great drama which he spontaneously frees, letting it overflow into the modern verses of his own genius. In the *Ballads*, Krleža does not construe metaphors from literary and linguistic experiences of his own or of others, but from the original and authentic spirit and language of the peasant's world, from its wretched but richly human cultural background, from the poor creature's own visualization of the problem of man's tragic subsistence, from the maledictions of the world. He thereby attains pictures of unique beauty and originality, and the truth which these pictures disclose with stirring force opens before our eyes sights not only of man's immeasurable tragedy through suffering but also of the real and surprisingly poetic and philosophic values of the democratic spirit of the people, of the inexhaustible wisdom and superiority of the victims of the world everywhere. *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* are a unique poetic fresco from which the indestructible fantasy of the masses speaks up in spite of their chains, and they speak up in such a way that human agony turns into a magnificent poetic apotheosis of the folk spirit which is undestroyable, into a celebration of the everlasting and universal truth in front

of which we stand in speechless awe. The simplified meaning of the *Ballads* is man's protest against slavery, injustice and inequality, but their meditative compositions are neither black and white, nor simplified. The *Ballads* represent a huge monument to the wisdom of man, but also to the perpetual damnation of life in which, as Krleža says — »even among flowers there is no justice«, that is, no equality.

A congenial translation of *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* into a foreign language is an almost impossible undertaking since the metaphoric properties of the ballads are profoundly submerged into their ingenuity of expression, into the authentic historical being and unique beauty of the language. In such cases a transposition of the poetic figures of speech never achieves adequate aesthetic results, but the essential imaginative features of this great poetic achievement of the Kajkavian dialect make the translations, in spite of everything, very attractive testimonies to the rare and polysemantic value of the original. Evidence to this effect is acknowledged by the successful translations of *The Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh* into Hungarian, Czech and French.

Krleža's analytical and critical vision of the world, as well as his poetics, reached a level in his numerous essays that can hardly be found elsewhere in world literature. Without exaggerating, it may be said that Krleža as an essayist is unsurpassable, that nobody controls this genre with such supremacy as he, and that nobody ever managed, to such an extent, to subordinate the word to the analytical function of the essay. In his famous books of essays *Eppur si muove*, *Europe Today*, *Ten Bloody Years*, and others, the force of his reflective arguments and sharp wit penetrates through the thick and poetical-dramatic tissue, sometimes fictitious, and elevates the essayistic prose to the uppermost expression of ideas, wit and language which is primarily due to Krleža's skill in introducing

passion and fascination into each and every sentence, regardless of how rational its function.

»And it's the same old round«, explains Krleža in one of his early essays — »and the earth revolves, and we move on from nineteen twelve to nineteen thirty to nineteen forty-eight. Regardless of what idiots and blind-men, fools and double-dealers may shout, we move on to nineteen forty-eight. And it's the same old round as it used to be, but we are one spiral bend higher up and we cannot fall back into the operetta of nineteen thirty, as we did in eighteen hundred, nor in nineteen forty-eight return back to the jumble of a hundred years ago. We cannot go back, because Brest-Litovsk and Scapa Flow and everything that happened on the Danube after Brest and that is happening below the Himalayas and around Peking are such facts that they cannot be wiped out by anybody living on this globe, which rolls on. The globe moves slowly, but it moves on nevertheless. And we, who feel this movement and serenely and maturely watch the sad retrospection, we believe we will fling over the bloody target and fly into the brilliant and calm purple spheres of peace, relaxation, contemplation, lyricism, creativity, bookwriting, which all presumes and end to clashes over machines and treasures and dividends. We believe, and this belief keeps us standing straight. Today we do not know whether it will happen tomorrow or the day after, or not until nineteen forty-eight or thirty forty-eight, but finally it's all the same when it will happen, because it will happen and because it has to happen! We do not believe this, we know it, and that is why we exist, because we know!«

The thematic cycle of Krleža's essayistics is very broad. It includes the most diverse fields of knowledge, perception, consciousness and skill, all those intellectual areas in which the historical, philosophic, aesthetic or sociological subject matter rendered the possibility for a brilliant, radical critique of the social consciousness and a fight to the bitter end against human ignorance and lies. In his essays,

Krleža is an encyclopedist possessing amazing erudition, and at the same time a philosopher of culture and a non-indoctrinized political theoretician who carries a polemical and poetical torch in his hand, based on a creative dialectical spirit instead of dogmas and myths, and strives to shed light onto man's struggling progress from the darkness towards the light as well as onto the most infinite variety of problems in the arts, history, politics and revolution. On the whole, Krleža's essays are the soliloquy of a rebellious intellectual who is in argument with the entire world, and a direct insight into the thematic variety and diversity of his essayistics are rendered in his *A Panorama of Views, Occurrences and Ideas* published in five books which represent a kind of a personal Krležian encyclopedia.

Between the two world wars, Krleža was the founder and director of several literary periodicals which did not last long because they were soon extinguished by the censors, but some of them were of capital significance for the various stages of intellectual development in monarchistic Yugoslavia of that time which was perpetually governed by police regimes and dictatorships. *Plamen*, which Krleža, together with Cesarec, a friend and fellow fighter from the days of his youth, founded in 1919, was banned as early as after its fifteenth issue. Thereafter, he directed *Književna republika* (1923—27), and then the periodical *Danas* (1934) and *Pečat* (1939—40). Soon after the liberation and in new social conditions, Krleža came out with a concept for the greatest publishing plan and undertaking in the history of southeastern Europe. With the direct support of Josip Broz Tito, with whom he had had ties of personal friendship for many years back, he founded in Zagreb (1950) the Yugoslav Lexicographic Institute and remained at its head, as director and editor-in-chief, until his death. During this period, he initiated the publishing of the Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia, the General Encyclopedia, the Maritime Encyclopedia, and thereafter encyclopedias on the fine arts, on music, medicine, forestry and series of other en-

cyclopedias which, with their 110 volumes published so far, have brought Yugoslav encyclopedistics, after five hundred years of its history, up to the highest European and world level. In the Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia and the other encyclopedias, Krleža, gathering around him thousands of co-workers who were stimulated by his dialectical-materialistic creative criticism, went into a thorough revision of the contemporary concepts and knowledge of the past, present and future of his country and the world. Going into battle with myths and prejudices of all kinds, he created a grandiose collective work with which he himself, as he always stressed, was not satisfied, but which objectively stands as a decisive, historical move of contemporary scientific thought away from the ideological labyrinths and indoctrinations of the former systems of thought.

»The encyclopedia«, said Krleža, when explaining his plan, »will have to include, logically, all those west European intellectual circles, within whose framework our people often worked as initiators of very important ideas, movements, discoveries and scientific and artistic practice and theory. From the Council of Basel to the Lateran Councils, from the problems of Reuchlin to Savonarola, from Trimalchion's Symposium to the subtle problems of classical metrics, from the first translations of Ptolemy and the first translation of the Koran into Latin to the struggle against numerous popes, from the indecision between the reformation and counter-reformation, from the first methodic history of the church to the first sociological analysis of clerical hierarchy, from Bacon the baron of Verulam and Galilei to Erasmus, from iatromechanics to Descartes, from the first Italian, Hungarian and Russian grammars to the first interpreters of Porphyrogenet and Bizantology as a separate discipline, from the prism to the parachute, from the Patareno ideology to neohellenistic arts between the Komnenoi and Paleolog families, that range of problems which our Encyclopedia should elucidate is indeed gigantic in all respects.« Fearless in

the face of this truly great task, Krleža put into it the seeds of the most progressive ideas of our times.

During his long creative life, Miroslav Krleža was also distinguished as a first-rate polemicist. His first clash was with the campaign against him in the twenties led by middle-class conservatives and their spokesmen in various areas of literary and cultural life. This rightist campaign, accompanied by insinuations and slanders, resulted in a book of brilliant polemics (*My Conflict With Them*, 1932) which completely discredited his opponents and forced them into retreat and silence. But Krleža achieved much more with this book of polemics: within the scope of Croatian literature and culture, he defeated the conservative spirit and established the permanent theoretical advantage of the progressive idea at a time, under conditions of antidemocratic police terror, when it could rarely be found elsewhere.

His second big polemical conflict occurred at the end of the thirties with a group of writers who, active in the so-called literary left, enjoyed the official support and protection of the Yugoslav Communist Party to which — as we have already mentioned — Krleža belonged since its foundation. Among others, Krleža came into a direct clash with Radovan Zogović and Milovan Djilas, who managed to impose upon the entire party their intense opposition towards Krležian criticism so that even the Secretary General, Josip Broz Tito, although he otherwise had an extraordinary respect for Krleža, had to distance himself from Krleža at the time.

Without a doubt, the underlying contextual essence of this dispute were political motives. Krleža's scepticism, especially his strong opposition to the methods of Stalin's policy (the Moscow trials, the war against Finland, etc.), could not be coordinated with the dynamic revolutionary strategy of the Yugoslav Communist Party, conditioned by the actual groupings of the political powers in Europe of that time, nor with the direct prospects of the Yugoslav revolution as a whole. Nevertheless,

the public polemics were primarily over literary matters and, on basis of the printed texts, the conflict itself could not be called political. After all, the issue is about the method of approach to a literary, or political, problem above all about the actual intentions or speculations of those who from a present-day standpoint wish to analyze the relationship between Krleža and the revolution. Namely, there are some tendencies that wish to present Krleža's activities during the end of the thirties as if he was an opponent of Tito's revolutionary aspirations, but these polemics do not render any proof for such conclusions.

In these polemics, Krleža stood up in defence of the dignity of the literary idiom against the dangers of vulgarization, and it is obvious that he did not wish to expand the front of this conflict to any other subject matters, especially not to political issues, so as to avoid causing political harm to the revolutionary movement to which he belonged. He only rose against petty writers who, due to their creative impotencies, stressed the need for political utilitarianism as the basic criterion of literary worth. He considered this sort of degradation of literature as barbarianism, and he gave his polemic conflict with it the title *Dialectical Antibarbarus* (1939). Basically, Krleža was at that time, without making any mention of it, polemizing with Stalin's theory about writers being »the engineers of the soul«, and he finally confirmed this in his well known paper during the congress of Yugoslav writers in Ljubljana in 1952, being exactly on Tito's line of resistance to Stalinistic doctrines, in a vehement and lucid finishing stroke to Zhdanovism, in which he completed his thought about the autonomous source of the creative function in literature.

Along with his well known foreword to *Motives of Podravina* by Krsto Hegedušić (1932), in which he bit into the problems of literary expression, his polemic text in *Dialectical Antibarbarus* and his paper in Ljubljana are fundamental documents not only for comprehending Krleža's views on the na-

ture of literature and the arts, but also for a theoretical insight into the problem of new aesthetics in the contemporary epoch of a global struggle for the democratic emancipation of nations, particularly small ones, but also those who are endangered by imperialistic, cultural or any other kind of hegemony. In this sense, both of these documents may be called the Magna Charta of the contemporary literary aesthetics of anti-dogmatic and truly democratic socialism which, in the dramatic events of the present-day world, increasingly forces itself upon us as the unavoidable and only humanistic alternative.

In order to round off this portrait of Miroslav Krleža's work, it is necessary to mention the five books of his *Diary* (1977) which he wrote off and on from 1914 to 1969 and which are endowed with all the characteristics of Krleža's idiom, temperament and power of observation. This is not a usual chronicle of events, but yet another brilliant excursus of Krleža's poetics and philosophy during periods that the writer follows, authentically records, and also experiences, above all from the angle of his own sensibility and reflections. In this light, the *Diary* is an inspiring interpretation of facts and experiences. It is a profoundly emotional literary, political and philosophical work which exhibits the presence of a great writer in the everyday events.

Krleža's significance in the total intellectual development of Yugoslavia in the past sixty years is almost incalculable. His books influenced whole generations with a magic impact and he decisively influenced the development and sharpening of criteria the currents of social thought, the collective perception, action and history. It is often said that Miroslav Krleža determined the criteria and coordinates for an entire epoch in the development of Croatian and other South Slavic literatures, but his influence in all the domains of life by far exceeded the limits of literature itself. He contributed to the victory of reason and humanism on all levels of public life and in the formation of a new critical consciousness which, abandoning inherited myths and ide-

ative establishments, continuously re-examines its relationship to the world. In his interpretation of Croatian national history and culture, actually in their demystification, Krleža built a completely new concept about the cultural identity of his people, who were oppressed for centuries, and about the genesis of a modern humanistic spirit which penetrated from the gory dark past of slavery through an inner dialecticism, one might perhaps say a Hegelian legitimacy, to the most avant-garde positions of contemporary revolution. In this respect, his philosophy of history has essentially contributed to the theory of class struggle.

The outstanding, in fact unique, structure of Krleža's idiom made it impossible for his work to provoke the tendency for imitation. However, although it was not possible to impersonate him, nor to imitate his style of writing, he created a kind of school of thought in literature and the other arts which, by its method of critical and dialectical perception of existential problems, especially through a philosophy of aesthetics and a philosophy of history, set itself apart as a phenomenon that became known as Krležianism. Indubitably, Krleža and Krležianism, as criterions of value, gave the basic imprint to everything that is understood by the term of a literary epoch. That epoch, which has been going on for more than sixty years in the literatures of the Southern Slavs, does not end with Krleža's death, since there are still no indications that its criteria have been prevailed over and since the general interest in Krleža's work is increasing.

Within the scopes of Croatian literature (which began with the prolific Glagolic stratum of the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th century and which with Marulić and Držić achieved a great breakthrough even in European proportions), Krleža's work by far outshines everything that had been created before it. It represents the summit of creativity in the history of all the Yugoslavian cultures. Serious analysts, whatever their theoretical positions, who have analyzed and evaluated Krleža's opus are com-

pletely unanimous in this respect. Future researchers, especially foreign analysts, are faced with the huge task of determining Krleža's significance in the main stream of world literature as precisely as possible. However, we in Yugoslavia, who are well acquainted with the power of Krleža's work, already now categorically claim that Miroslav Krleža is one of the most important and most daring writers of the 20th century. And time will, there is no doubt about it, confirm this appraisal.

Translated by Slobodan Drenovac