

## Croatian Renaissance Poetry

At the end of the fifteenth century on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, there appeared a new literary activity in the Croatian tongue, essentially different from the earlier, medieval writing by its secular appeal even when treating of religious matters, by the richness and the versatility of the language in which occasional Church Slavonic elements appeared as mere tokens of a continuity, but many non-Slavic loanwords entered. The extant manuscripts and printed texts belonging to that new phase date from the very beginning of the sixteenth century and appeared almost simultaneously in Split, Zadar, and Hvar — seaports under Venetian rule — Senj (where there was a printing shop) in that part of Croatia that was under its own ban (a viceroy recognizing the Hungarian crown), and, flourishing more than anywhere, in the Ragusan, or Dubrovnik, Republic. At that time (1358–1526) Dubrovnik fully recognized the sovereignty of the Magyar-Croatian king, but as the territorial continuity with the region ruled by the ban had been broken by the Turkish invasion and Venetian annexation, Dubrovnik actually became an independent patrician republic, paying a tribute, “the price of peace,” to the mighty Turk. This enabled the Republic to use the spacious Ottoman Empire as its trading territory, thus increasing the wealth of its citizens, who still mentioned the old sovereign in their prayers — the Ragusans remaining *cattolicissimi*.

The personalities crowning medieval literary activity and belonging at the same time to the new times were **MARKO MARULIĆ** (1450–1524) of Split, author of *Judita* (*Judith*), a narrative poem in which the Biblical story becomes an allegory of Split's own precarious position in the Turkish wars, and **MAVRO VETRANOVIĆ** (c. 1482–1576) of Dubrovnik, author of the fantastic allegorical epic *Piligrin* (*The Pilgrim*). Both of them also wrote satirical, humorous, and lyrical verse; Marulić is at his best when applying an elaborate and striking metaphor to express a religious concept, Vetranović when expressing his intimate relation with Nature and also in his occasional poetry reacting to current events, especially to the troubles an author might have in that small and busy society.

Classical reminiscences are present in that poetry from the very beginning. But while the epic more and more followed the Virgilian mould, the lyrics, as in the rest of Europe, could not avoid the impact of Petrarch, who was placed among the classics by the Italian academicians in the sixteenth century. The very first Croatian Renaissance lyrical poets were influenced by a phase of Petrarchism which had developed in Naples under Spanish rule around 1480. That phase showed a clear trend to restore the older troubadour elements. Croatian poets in that jigsaw puzzle of dominions retained the

older metric forms (the most popular was a twelve-syllable verse, closely resembling the French alexandrine) and their rather complicated rhyme schemes. From the very beginning we see in the poets an awareness of two styles, if not even two idioms, an urban and a countryside one. We see sleepless lonely walkers expiring under the tormenting windows of their cruel golden-tressed ladies, but also family-loving, merry lads and lasses gathering roses or shooting arrows in the verdant regions where Sun, Wind, and Cloud speak with human voices. An older poetic tradition is clearly visible (Marulić even refers to it), linked no doubt with feudal life or rather the courts of the gentry existing somewhere out of the coastal urban trading centers, which were now steeped in the Petrarchan convention. The pastoral imagery and the urban imagery, together with classical reminiscences and very local allusions, we find ably fused in a unit in many instances, as in our first eclogue, a pastoral dialogue with the features of a simple play, *Radmio i Ljubmir* (*Radmio and Ljubmir*) by **DŽORE DRŽIĆ** (1461–1501). Ljubmir — and that name came to mean a stock character — is a shepherd from the neighbouring regions, who reveals to us that his actual name is Džore (George). He is bound to wander restlessly, as the girl he is in love with is joining the circle of Diana's virgin nymphs. Let us remember that Diana is the name by which Vetranović once addressed the Virgin, and that George became a priest in his mature years. Is Džore not perhaps letting us in on an autobiographical detail, his love for a young nun?

Džore Držić's more prolific literary twin, **ŠIŠKO MENČETIĆ** (1457–1527), left several hundred poems full of a playboy sensuality — the little we know about his life frequently comes from police reports on his carousing and molesting of womenfolk in the streets of Dubrovnik; after a wild youth and a sober merchant maturity, he fell victim to the plague at the age of seventy. The Platonic sentiment of Petrarch is completely missing, as it is, to be sure, in the case of his fifteenth-century Italian models. We feel a youthful sincerity in his description of joyful lovers' meetings and in his expression of Love's pangs: maddening unrequited love. He also tells of his pride in being a poet, and indeed he and Džore created a style that was to last for centuries. It was not only the verse form that they fixed (though they did not invent it), but they also tentatively started a playful, punlike use of their Slavic idiom, which was to lead by its own track to the elaborate, gaudy Baroque metaphors.

A popular poetic genre of the times was the carnival poem, the *mascherata*, in its original form the monologue of a masque, obscene but witty in the hands of **NIKOLA NALJEŠKOVIĆ** (c. 1500–87) — the author of realistic farces devoid of any moral principles — but even pious in the case of Vetranović's *Remeta* (*The Hermit*). The best and most popular *mascherata* is *Jeđupka* (*The Gypsy*), a saucy fortunetelling for six ladies performed by a man disguised as a Gypsy woman, the last lady being the one of his heart. According to tradition the author is a somewhat mythical Ragusan goldsmith by the name of **ANDRIJA ČUBRANOVIĆ**, but it is more probable that the actual author is **MIKŠA PELEGRINOVIĆ** (c. 1500–62), a nobleman from the

island of Hvar. **MARIN DRŽIĆ** (c. 1508–67) also wrote some lyrical and occasional poetry, though his plays are his greatest contribution to Croatian literature. In verse form there are some pastorals like *Tirena*, where the tender emotion of our friend Ljubmir does not only meet the enraged opposition of a satyr in love with the same nymph, but also of the real rustic sheep-herding populace of the highlands, where old and young are raving mad in Love's pangs caused by the arrows of a hurt and self-asserting Cupid. His erudite Plautine plays are in prose, like *Skup*, in the wake of *Aulularia*, as well as the best and most popular of his plays, *Dundo Maroje* (*Uncle Maroje*), where a rich and stingy *senex* chases his prodigal son, who is spending his initial capital on a Roman courtesan among a picturesque bunch of braggart soldiers, youthful friends, pedants, peasants, and permanently hungry and thirsty scheming servants.

The academic phase of Petrarchism, so important for the development of Italian poetry and language, did have some influence on Croatian poetry too, but it is not comparable with the impact it had on the Peninsula. A new interest in the classics, especially in Ovid, accompanied that trend, without essentially changing the general course. **HANIBAL LUCIĆ** (c. 1485–1553) is famous for his systematic, colourful, and quick-moving verse in the detailed praise of his beloved "Jur nijedna na svit vila" ("No Other Nymph upon This Earth"). **DINKO RANJINA** (1536–1607) put forward some secondhand ideas about a renewal modeled upon the classics, paid homage to, and underlined the importance of, the Lyrical Twins Šiško and Džore, warning also against the sterility of clichés. He displayed his poetic craft by treating the same subject matter in different styles, sometimes also in Italian, thereby gaining a wider popularity. Actually, his poetry, remaining sensual, was a step closer to the approaching Baroque phase. A truer follower of the Petrarchan revival was **DOMINKO ZLATARIĆ** (1558–1613) with his Platonic sentiment and thorough erudition.

The next period, which is not covered in this selection, is the Ragusan "Golden Age," where the best lyrical poet is **IVAN BUNIĆ VUČIĆ** (1592–1658) with his *Plandovanja* (*Leisure Hours*), a manuscript collection of love verse pleasantly boyish though showing elaborate figurative and prosodic features. The newly fashionable Anacreontic touch, coming from the French poets of the *Pléiade*, may be clearly seen in many of his poems. **IVAN GUNDULIĆ** (1589–1638), famous for his Virgilian Catholic epic *Osman*, praising the far-off Poles taken as Slavic compatriots, as successful fighters against the Turks, wrote a remarkable and essentially lyrical poem on the theme of the transiency of human earthly existence, *Suze sina razmetnoga* (*The Tears of the Prodigal Son*), reminiscent of the verse of the English Jesuit Robert Southwell, but surpassing him in the vigorous quality of his imagery.

The polished Ragusan literary standard was deftly used and somewhat improved by poets like **DŽONO PALMOTIĆ** (1607–57) in his numerous but somewhat too smooth melodramas, and **IGNJAT ĐURĐEVIĆ** (1675–1737), whose narrative Baroque poem *Uzdasi Mandaljene pokornice* (*The Sighs of Mag-*

*dalene the Penitent*) did not meet the approval he had expected from the public. The elegant, ornate, and affected style was nearing its natural death, giving way to a verse in folk style (which, by the way, even he tried to echo in a few instances), more primitive but more penetrating, pleasing the ears of a broader public, a great part of which had emerged quite recently from under Turkish rule. The polished urban poetry was to be born again a century later.

*Ivan Slamnig*