

#4

m DOSSIER: SLAVKO MIHALIĆ o



Travelling with a smile

Chronology

Tea Benčić

(Written according to the author's own accounts in "Biography", afterword to the book "The Approach of the Storm — Selection from the Works", Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1996)

1928

Slavko Mihalić was born on March 16 in Karlovac, on the banks of the Kupa River. His mother Zlata, nee Milčić, after teachers' college decided on the theatre and was for years the most popular actress in Karlovac. As well as artistic talent, she had an excellent soprano voice and with his father, a talented baritone, she sang Italian operas and forgotten folk songs from north west Croatia. His father Stjepan was one of the best Croatian novelists of the period, a fertile short story writer, travel writer, columnist and playwright.

Slavko Mihalić spent his early childhood on the banks of the Kupa:

Right here, on the bank of the blinded river
The whole of life went on for you to come back here
Underneath the sky you left at last
Rift, so that it's a genuine miracle you've stayed together
Say, one day in spring,
When everything is grey and bristling
And every bird a bird of prey, and every stone a blow

(*On the banks of the Kupa*)

in an atmosphere of books and magazines, music, drawings, watercolours and oil paintings (excellent reproduc-

tions of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and Rembrandt's *Anatomy* hung on the walls), in an atmosphere of discussion about literature, language (his godfather was Ljudevit Jonke), especially about "conflict on the literary left", about politics. In a modest rented apartment always full of intellectuals, Slavko soon learned to draw (openly) and write (covertly).

1942-1947

Slavko wrote his first poem at Christmas 1942, because Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day were the biggest days in the year in his family. In that dreadful period of war that had engulfed the whole of Europe, the song told of a squad of lead soldiers going over the table, the last of them dragging the stump of his missing leg, and then all turning into people. Then there was a poem about willows by the Kupa, and many others of which there is no trace remaining today. He wrote dramatic scenes, a novel about the life of insects with the hero an ant called Slavko, selling the novel to his friend Robert, who was soon to disappear in the whirlwind of war. This was his first royalty. Later, in his recollections, in the collection *Karlovački diptih*, he would recall many of the images of his childhood, especially the part called "The age of learning smells".

Its blossoms were a timid whisper.
Do you still grow, slender plum-tree,
by the house's southern wall
transformed since then, in wheeling



Slavko Mihalić was proclaimed the prettiest child in the country (1929/30)

reality,
into a memory trap...
Do you still bring tight tiny fists
to those purple breasts, so sweet upon
the tongue
of a moon-walker, twelve years old
kissing his shirt in transport of delight...
It all was far too clear, too reasonable.
The dream dug out of his own eyes.
A rustling, then the army, a glimmer,
then the war.
How, amidst those blood-crazed nights
did you endure your loneliness, for a
boy's gaze
was turned towards the sky, where
metal angels thundered in the darkness...



Mihalić's father, Stjepan, a writer

Explosions rearranged your heart.
 And afterwards, a long time, nothing
 happened,
 but now, this one remaining night
 I would raise up that tree's memorial.
 Its leaves between my fingers. But
 there's no more fruit. The world has
 grazed
 on all its first-born sweetness.

(Memory trap)

As well as doing his writing on the quiet, Slavko Mihalić also drew and painted, in pencil, Indian ink, pastels, watercolours, tempera, and at home there was a general belief that he was to go to the art academy. But after he passed his school leaving exam in 1947 it turned out that there was no money, and Slavko took a job in his father's firm "until better times". While he was at high school in Karlovac he started his first school paper, *Tornado*, written by hand. He wanted to go to Zagreb as soon as possible, and carried out his intention "over night", much against the wishes of his father, mother and sister, going off to be a newspaperman in the just founded

Croatian editorial office of *Borba*. He arrived in Zagreb in December 1947, when the conflict between Tito and Stalin was already smouldering. As an "independent reporter" he travelled much across the country, getting to see places and cities he had known only from postcards before. He got into all the secrets of printing. But conditions in the paper, where the editors were in fact censors, became unbearable. He was hauled over the coals for going everyday to the Writers' and Journalists' Club (then in Gajeva 2), because everything was "suspect" there, while in fact Slavko was just meeting young writers, musicians and painters. The conflicts continued to sharpen. But when he had come to Zagreb, he had enrolled as a part-time student of Italian and the history of art (in the course of Ivo Frangeš). Resigning from *Borba* in 1952, and living off tiny royalties, including from the puppet play *Cinderella*, he decided to switch courses in the Faculty and take Croatian literature and language, because it had become clear to him that in the contest between literature and painting, poetry had won the upper hand.

1947-1954

At the Faculty of Philosophy, Slavko Mihalić was the moving spirit behind the founding of a Contemporary Literature Club, which started issuing the first number of its own paper *Tribina* on May 1. Mihalić became chief editor, and was

also responsible for the layout; the editorial board also included Radovan Ivančević, Sveto Petrović, Čedo Prica and Josip Pupačić. This was the time when the young were making their breakthrough, when several similar literary papers were starting up, some of which were not to last longer than one or two numbers. This happened with *Tribina* as well; in June its second and last number came out. "The wise leadership" attacked *Tribina* and its editor in public for bringing surrealism into Croatia; this referred to the verses of Vlado Gotovac who, along with a number of others, published his first verses and essay in this student monthly. This was the time of the poetry of "the

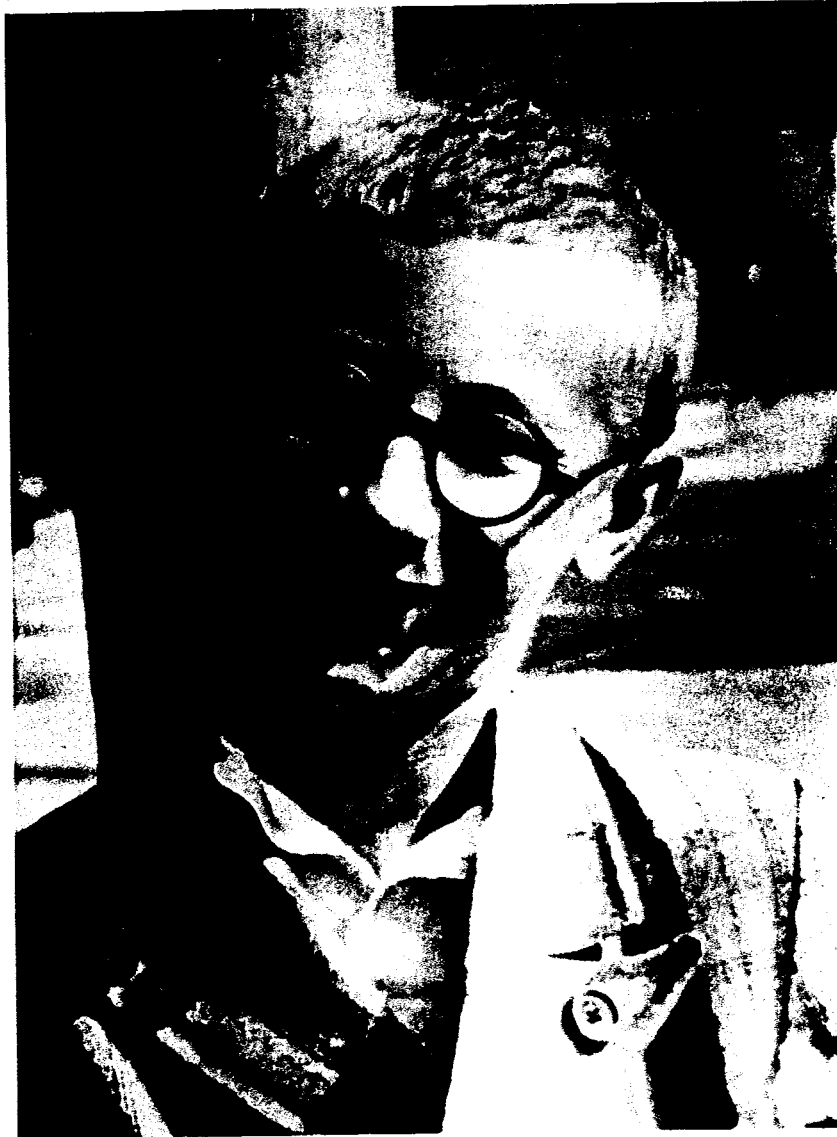


Slavko and Stjepan Mihalić, 1930

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Slavko Mihalić in Karlovac (childhood)

left and the right” pockets, that is, those that according to the criteria of the commissars could be published, and those that were pronounced “decadent, meaningless and bourgeois”, and mainly read on toilet seats at home. Slavko Mihalić did not write “leftist” poetry about tractors, co-operatives, electrification, industrialisation, five-year plans and Tito, but he did publish some sentimental rhymed verses about fog, words, love, heartache which were actually a compromise with his much more profoundly radical understanding of poetry. The cycle called

Ponoćni zapisi (Midnight Records), printed in the second number of *Tribina* was his first essay at existential searchings, and he became a recognised poet at a literary evening in the old building of the Philosophical Faculty, in Room X, reading his poem *Pristajanja*.

Ships put to shore in many ways:
some of them violently banging and
cracking,
others gently, like lovers...
(Putting to shore)

He had become a modernist much earlier, in Karlovac, but for years he was unable to publish this kind of poem. Even the journal *Izbor* (the rather starchy predecessor of *Krugovi*) refused to print his drama *Čovjek s dva lica (The Man with Two Faces)* which was written in totalitarian times.

At this initial time, Slavko says that he was influenced by Ujević, Apollinaire, Supervielle, Nietzsche, Rilke and Trakl, although from his earliest youth he had read *all* poetry. Poems which particularly impressed him he would write down in his own personal anthology. Since he could not live from writing poetry at that time, in 1952 and 1953 he printed columns, reportage, interviews and even a number of short stories for youth papers with names like “The Young Fighter”, “Youth Paper” and “Horizon” which had started to come out on the newspaper market with rather more libertarian ideas but often had problems with the bosses of the youth organisations who were fairly unscrupulously, via the younger generation, making their way through into Party politics.

In 1953 he printed his first poems in the then central Croatian literary magazine of the younger generation, *Krugovi*, and married Ana Tomić, who had been forced to flee from Lika in 1941 when the Chetniks burned the Croatian village of Rudopolje near Gračac. Both of them were penniless; it was in a sub-let flat at Buconjićeva 6, earlier a meeting place for the “young”, that their first son, Zlatko, was born; three years later came Tomislav, this time in Ulica 8. Maja 41 (now Trenkova). The youth organisation bosses could not forgive him such a marriage, and for family reasons he began to look for another, more secure job. He found this in Lykos, something of a backwoods company that also published *Lika News*. In a few months, not only had he married a woman from Lika, but he had gone all over the area on foot, insofar as was allowed.

Lykos had a small printing shop in Duga ulica; it occurred to Mihalić that for not much money he could bring out a little book of twelve poems. Since



The Mihalić family: Zlata (mother), Stjepan (father), Slavko and his wife, his sister Jagoda and her husband, grandchildren (1952)

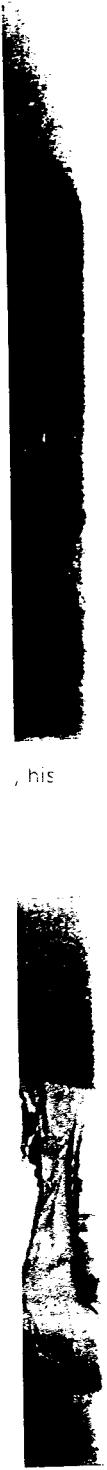
this was not specifically legally prohibited, in a few days (in 1954) Slavko's first book *Chamber Music (Komorna muzika)* came out. The title of the book looked back to his childhood days: very early on he had attended Music School in Karlovac. He had wanted to play the piano, but it was impossible to get a piano through the door of the little flat in Mažuranićeva ulica, even if they had had the money. He began to play the cello, on an instrument borrowed from the school, but the professor soon died and he had to return it. Then he decided on the flute, but the teacher fled the country. Nevertheless, in spite of all these difficulties, Slavko knew a lot about music, and so chamber music means an intimate style of making music, on one or several instruments, which fits in very well with his aim of writing in a way that was different from the stagy, grandiloquent, metaphoromaniac style of the time.



Slavko Mihalić with actresses from the Karlovac theatre



Slavko Mihalić as a twenty-four-year-old.



, his

I would like to know from where this emptiness comes, so that I can change myself into a clear lake where the bottom can be seen, but without fish.

But without shells, crabs, without the underwater plants which at least hide some kind of name, today I am nameless. Some of me is already disappearing.

And so, speaking of emptiness, I stir the water in the lake, scattering sand and other tiny particles settled on the bottom. I'm feeling nauseous.

I walk the streets with my head down, just like another lake, first dark, afterwards even polluted; and let's not say anything of those repulsive creatures that crawl on the bottom so that now I stink even to myself.

(Metamorphosis)

The most successful part of the first collection, thought Slavko, was the fact that the Lykos management got to know all the capabilities of their own printing shop, and proposed that the collection should be made, retrospectively, part of the firm's own list, and thus freed from taxes. He was appointed poetry editor. Thus the *Little Poetry Library* published, in only two years, forty or so collections of poems, of almost all the "young" poets of the time (Miličević, Juriša, Stahuljak, B. Pavlović, Prica, Slamnig, Špoljar, Cvitan, Raos, Vunak, Vrkljan, Golob, Mader, Ivančan, Slaviček, Šoljan, Sabljak, Majer, Kaštelan and others). Several other series were also started: *Putovi (Paths)* had a selection of poets (Stanislav Šimić, Zlatko Tomičić, Tin Ujević, Vlado Vlasićević, Drago Ivanišević, Vlado Kovačić, Vesna Parun); *Poets and Nations*, with translations from French, English, Spanish, Italian, Slovene, Czech, Chinese, Japanese, with Black and Indian poetry;

Anthologies, in which the first post-war anthologies of Croatian poetry came out, love poetry, satires and verse in the Kaikavian dialect.

1954-1961

Mihalić's collection *Journey into Non-existence* was the thirteenth volume in the *Little Poetry Library* (the end of 1956), about which a great deal was written, with Šoljan's review in *Republika* for 1957 being particularly well remembered. Then the poets became friends, for as Mihalić said: "Tonko was friendly only with people who cared for literature". After this book came out, Mihalić became a member

tempted to defend the printing of books of poetry, which was meant to be the business of others (i.e., of those who did not publish poetry), but no one was shaken. Lykos and its nimble manager Željko Grbac organized the Plitvice Poetry Festival in 1956; this was repeated two years later in Opatija and the general area of Rijeka. This was a "poetry festival" that the political and police authorities attempted many times to trip up.

In 1959 Lykos published *Darežljivo progonstvo*, the 41st book in the *Little Poetry Library* (now edited by Đuro Šnajder); the book was designed by Mihalić himself. On April 29 of the same year, Mihalić became chief edi-



The editorial office of Lykos

of the Croatian Writers Association and won a prize from the Association. Lykos also published Mihalić's records of the mentally sick, *Iskrišta u tmini*, while Zora brought out a new collection of poems called *Početak zaborava (The Beginning of Oblivion)*. Thus the great Zora had finally opened up its doors to the young.

The breakthrough of Lykos and young Croatian poetry did not pass off painlessly. Poets and editors were summoned to interrogations, and at-

tor and technical editor of the bi-monthly *Književna tribina*, published by the same firm. Twenty five numbers came out, accompanied by the same sour faces of the ideological committees, who could not conceive of the idea of a paper coming out, even a literary paper, at the birth of which they had not themselves assisted; in the end, they put a stop to it, the more so because political persecutions were being stepped up.

In autumn 1961 Mihalić knocked on

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Zlatko Tomičić, R. Štiglic and Slavko Mihalić (1948)

the doors of the publisher Naprijed, offering them the completed collection called *Seasons*. Kalman Vajs agreed to print the book, but they could not agree as to the dates. Mihalić then withdrew the manuscript and resolved on self-publishing again. The collection came out in a month, and good reviews (Šoljan's in particular once again) stimulated good sales. Then came the sensation: although the book had come out in samizdat form, in May 1962, Mihalić received the City of Zagreb Prize from the hands of the mayor, Većeslav Holjevac.

No longer afraid; I feel my wolf-teeth showing.
No longer the beaten path, for heaven's sake, bushes tempt me in the open field.
If my eyes flash, the crows flap their wings with contempt.

Not even houses, sidewalks or turnpikes,
Insatiable breasts reaching up after the snow.

I won't get lost, the winds point the goal.
Mine is on the other side.

No longer the question of time.
My doubled steps advance more quickly.
How prettily the lantern of my wolf-eye grins.

Hunters, already tonight I'll arrive
To the meadow that ate the tracks of the betrayer,



Slavko Mihalić in the sixties

Calling to my mighty self in heaven,
Alone, for such is the victory.

(*Alone, for such is the victory*)
(Sam, jer takva je pobjeda. *Seasons*, 1961)

1961-1968

Because of the incessant changes in Lykos, which changed its "nationalist" editors and stopped printing poetry, Mihalić, overnight, at the invitation of Mirko Božić, the editor of the new cultural weekly *Telegram*, became technical editor and later editor. Since the editorial board was situated in the premises of the Writers Association, Mihalić was now here more engaged as a professional writer (the bureaucracy had thought up the ironical name of "free artist"). In 1964 he was elected secretary of the Association, while Dragutin Tadijanović became its president. The same year, at the congress of the Federation of Writers of Yugoslavia in Titograd it was informally thought that the president and the chief secretary of the Federation would be Meša Selimović and Mladen Oljača, but writers were less than obe-



Mihalić receives a prize for his collection of poems *The Seasons*. In this picture, he is with the mayor of Zagreb of the time, Većeslav Holjevac

dent and wanted to a secret vote. At the end of considerable arguments, two people stood for president: Mihajlo Lalić and Meša Selimović, and three for secretary: Slavko Mihalić (to his disdainful surprise), Mladen Ojača and Saša Petrov.

Selimović and Mihalić were elected, an act that Oljača interpreted as being directed against the Serbian Writers Association, of which he was secretary, and he announced that the Federation would be obstructed. Mihalić had gained the votes of the Croats and modernists in general. Brana Crnčević had threatened him in Titograd: "Don't forget that there is still night in Belgrade." Croatian writers were

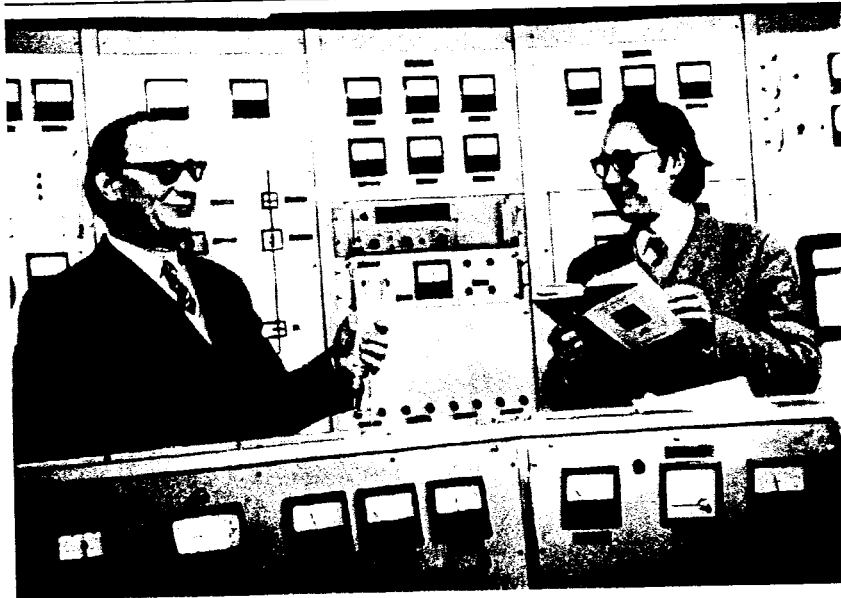
worried (Mirko Božić, Miroslav Krleža, Marijan Matković, Ervin Šinko) and suggested that Mihalić should give up (Krleža telling him "The Serbs will put one over one you", to which Mihalić replied: "You don't know me"). Serb obstruction came in handy, as was shown at Bled in 1964/65, because without them it was much easier to decide on a charter for the Federation of Writers of Yugoslavia. Later on, it was the Serbs who were to bring it to dissolution, as they were the state of Yugoslavia itself.

In the archives of the Federation Mihalić discovered that money had been obtained to start a magazine in foreign languages, and since his pre-

decessor had done nothing, Mihalić started the first number of the review *The Bridge (Most)*, which came out in 1966 for the first time in Belgrade, while the second number, for April and June, appeared in Zagreb, where Mihalić came back to, to his family which had not seen Belgrade.

In 1964 a collection of poems was published by Zora of Zagreb: *Ljubav za stvarnu zemlju (Love for a real land)*, but because of great floods in Zagreb the proofs floated away and the collection came out with a mass of errors. A year later Bagdala (which printed Gotovac, Vesna Krmpotić, Slamnig, Slaviček and Šoljan) published the collection *Persecuted ballad*, called after

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Slavko Mihalić and Nedjeljko Fabrio (1971)

the poem that was most read; it was written about by many.

for my father and mother
 It happened suddenly
 Out of the blue, a south wind was in
 the air
 And autumn seemed like spring
 It happened with the sun's smile on
 our lips

That man, with shoulders like moun-
 tains
 With a swirl of wisdom in his eyes
 With hands heavy as thunder
 A blow from his fist wouldn't pass
 unheard

That man on that strange day
 I say: a girl unbuttoned her blouse
 (Looked through her window instead
 of into her mirror)
 I say: on the shore a willow bore cat-
 kins

He gave tongue from out of the depths
 Each and every cloud was scattered
 He sang with so tuneful a voice
 The street went numb (as if it slipped
 out of its dress)

At first from shame
 Then from great joy

An orange-seller flung wide the doors
 of his shop

And it still wasn't enough for him
 And it still wasn't enough for him
 Just a little more
 And he wrote above the door
 Take what belongs to you

But after the night which followed



At the funeral of Branko Miljković (Pupačić, Mihalić, Miličević, Vereš, Šoljan)

After the minutes which came in dark
 suits
 After the seconds with top hats and
 bamboo canes

The accursed north wind blew
 The girl buttoned up her blouse
 The catkins fell from the willow
 The shopkeeper went back to his cus-
 tomers

It began in the suburbs

And the man who was singing
 Reduced to the size of a microbe
 And subjected to immobility
 Was exiled

Someone had to pay for it all

(Exiled Ballad)

In 1966 Matica hrvatska published
 Mihalić's *Selected Poems* in a rather
 strange cover, which had actually been
 prepared for an earlier Mihalić title,
Decision at Noon, which had been
 given up. In 1967 the book received
 the Matica hrvatska prize.
 The Znanje publishing company asked
 Mihalić, Josip Pupačić and Antun
 Šoljan to compile an anthology of
 Croatian 20th century poetry. Meeting



Slavko Mihalić and Dragutin Tadijanović in the seventies

in Zagreb and Rovinj, bringing in the occasional "unwanted" name (Wiesner, Vida), and choosing their own favourite poets, they made an anthology that came out in 1966. In the same year, Prosveta of Belgrade printed Mihalić's book *Lake* (a poem cycle and the poem *Jezero/Lake*, earlier printed in *Razlog* in Zagreb, while Gane Todorovski translated it into Macedonian and had it printed in Skoplje).

On returning to Zagreb Mihalić went on working in *Telegram*, and, while chief editor of *The Bridge*, gathered together a group of translators who translated Croatian literature into some of the world's major languages. Thanks to the translator Janine Matillon-Lasić, a series of books entitled *Poesie croate contemporaine* came out, including titles by Šimić, Cesarić, Tadijanović, Horvatić, Mihalić, Kaštelan, Slamnig, Zidić, Šoljan, Ujević, Parun, Miličević, Kranjčević and Dizdar.

In 1966 Slavko Mihalić was once again elected secretary of the Writers Association, with Vlatko Pavletić as president. The next year, Mihalić started off *Zagreb Literary Talks*.

Dramatic events began on April 9, 1968, when an amendment to the draft of the federal law relating to language

was proposed in Matica hrvatska (Ljudevit Jonke). All were agreed in wanting to call their language by its own name. A commission was appointed that included Mihalić, as secretary, as well as Dalibor Brozović, Radoslav Katičić, Tomislav Ladan, Slavko Pavešić and Miroslav Brandt. They at once wrote their first text. The final proposal to the amendment reached the Association on Monday,

March 13, 1938, and on the 15th the *Declaration about the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language* was voted for and passed unanimously. A day later Mihalić called the editor of *Telegram*, Mirko Bošnjak, about the Plenum and suggested that he included the text of the Declaration in the number of the paper that he was just preparing the lay-out for. When he unwillingly agreed, Mihalić gave the text to the duty editor, Zvonimir Golob, who hurried off to the printers. Mihalić called the chief of the printing works at *Vjesnik* and said: "This time, please do not criticise me for lateness and changes. This is a historic moment for the Croatian people."

Soon after, the editor of *Telegram* was sacked, and Mihalić, who had to resign from the editorial board, tried to bring his friends into the Association, without success, however, since the Croatian Spring was on the way.

1968-1975

Mihalić was still nevertheless working in *The Bridge*, which now came out every other month and printed, for example, anthologies of Croatian poetry in German (1969) and English (1970), over 500 pages of contempo-



Pupačić, Mihalić, Gotovac

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rary Croatian prose in two volumes (1970-1971), edited by Ivan Kušan and Slavko Mihalić, with the help of the well known French publisher Pierre Seghers. They also published an anthology of the whole of Croatian poetry in French (this project was supported, via the Ministry of Culture, by Mika Tripalo).

In 1969, a new collection of Mihalić's poems, *Last Supper*, came out from Matica hrvatska, Zagreb; this bore traces of his periods in Split, Prague and Zurich. In 1970 the book won Mihalić's second City of Zagreb prize. In the same year Mihalić worked with the Slovene poet, and a friend of his, Edvard Kocbek, who was one of the people on the Slovene black list. Kocbek translated Slavko's verses into Slovene (*Prostor in čas*), while Mihalić put his *Strava* into Croatian.

In 1970 Slavko Mihalić was once again elected secretary of the Croatian Writers Association, and then the main secretary of the Federation.

In 1972 the French publisher Seghers, after a long period of preparation, printed *La poesie croate, des origines a nos jours*. Among the seventy poets represented was Vlado Gotovac, by now already in jail.

During 1972 Mihalić was forced to leave not only the management of the Association, but *The Bridge* and *Zagreb Literary Talks* as well. Once again he was on the streets, jobless and proscribed; however, the government let him sub-edit *Vjesnik* fiction specials — crime, love and western novels.

In 1972 Mihalić's collection *The Garden of Black Apples* appeared in Razlog (edited by Milan Mirić and Ante Stamać), showing clear signs of the inhuman time. "If I were to write in prose what you do in poetry, I would end up in jail," said Petar Segedin to Mihalić.

In 1973 an anthology of *New Croatian Poetry* came out in Skoplje, edited by Gane Todorovski and Slavko Mihalić, without, however, five poems by Vlado Gotovac and two by Zlatko Tomičić. It was explained that both poets had been sentenced to long prison terms

and loss of their civic rights. Mihalić was asked nothing, while the book was mainly ignored in Macedonia.

Mihalić devoted himself to painting his surrealist and expressionist vision (especially in marker pens) in the hope of making a bit of money.

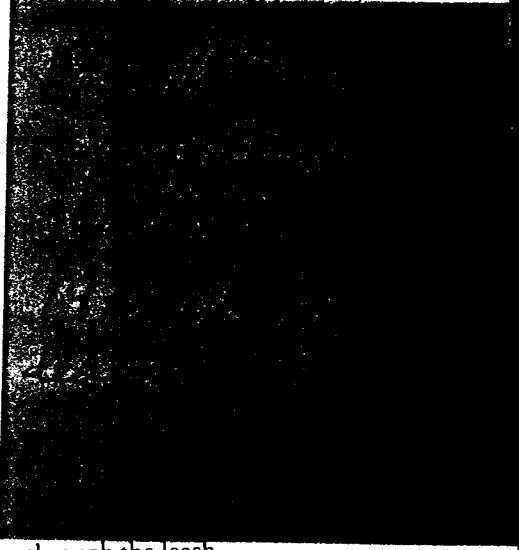
Zagreb's Školska knjiga ordered an *Anthology of Slovene Poetry* from Mihalić and Ciril Zlobec. It came out in 1974 with a print order of 10,000 copies. Mihalić himself translated over 3,000 lines. Two more editions were to come out, each one considerably augmented. In the same year a Mihalić's *Last Supper* came out in Slovene in Ljubljana, translated by Vena Taufer and with an afterword by Antun Šoljan. At the same time Mihalić's poems came out in Trieste as well, in both Croatian and Slovene (translations by Ciril Zlobec). Later, some of these poems were to appear in Zagreb's *Forum*, and Mihalić was to be saved by them having been printed earlier in Italy.

In 1975 Mihalić's *Anthology of Croatian Poetry* was printed by the Cankar Foundation in Slovenia, with poets from the very earliest to contemporaries. Mihalić provided a foreword, and the best Slovene translators were engaged, with Ciril Zlobec at their head. This was the first anthology of

Croatian poetry printed in ex-Yugoslavia outside Croatia to include old Croatian poets whom the Serbs were insistent on trying to appropriate for their own culture (probably in order to be able to get hold of the Croatian coast).

1975-1982

In spite of the Zagreb party bosses who were following every move Mihalić made and attempting to stop him working, in Slovenia as well, the Slovenes awarded him *Župančičeva*



through the leash.



Mihalić, Novak, Šoljan

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In 1972 the French publisher Seghers, after a long period of preparation, printed *La poesie croate, des origines a nos jours*. Among the seventy poets represented was Vlado Gotovac, by now already in jail.

During 1972 Mihalić was forced to leave not only the management of the Association, but *The Bridge* and *Zagreb Literary Talks* as well. Once again he was on the streets, jobless and proscribed; however, the government let him sub-edit *Vjesnik* fiction specials — crime, love and western novels.

In 1972 Mihalić's collection *The Garden of Black Apples* appeared in *Razlog* (edited by Milan Mirić and Ante Stamać), showing clear signs of the inhuman time. "If I were to write in prose what you do in poetry, I would end up in jail," said Petar Segedin to Mihalić.

In 1973 an anthology of *New Croatian Poetry* came out in Skoplje, edited by Gane Todorovski and Slavko Mihalić, without, however, five poems by Vlado Gotovac and two by Zlatko Tomičić. It was explained that both poets had been sentenced to long prison terms

and loss of their civic rights. Mihalić was asked nothing, while the book was mainly ignored in Macedonia.

Mihalić devoted himself to painting his surrealist and expressionist vision (especially in marker pens) in the hope of making a bit of money.

Zagreb's Školska knjiga ordered an *Anthology of Slovene Poetry* from Mihalić and Ciril Zlobec. It came out in 1974 with a print order of 10,000 copies. Mihalić himself translated over 3,000 lines. Two more editions were to come out, each one considerably augmented. In the same year a Mihalić's *Last Supper* came out in Slovene in Ljubljana, translated by Vena Taufer and with an afterword by Antun Šoljan. At the same time Mihalić's poems came out in Trieste as well, in both Croatian and Slovene (translations by Ciril Zlobec). Later, some of these poems were to appear in Zagreb's *Forum*, and Mihalić was to be saved by them having been printed earlier in Italy.

In 1975 Mihalić's *Anthology of Croatian Poetry* was printed by the Cankar Foundation in Slovenia, with poets from the very earliest to contemporaries. Mihalić provided a foreword, and the best Slovene translators were engaged, with Ciril Zlobec at their head. This was the first anthology of

Croatian poetry printed in ex-Yugoslavia outside Croatia to include old Croatian poets whom the Serbs were insistent on trying to appropriate for their own culture (probably in order to be able to get hold of the Croatian coast).

1975-1982

In spite of the Zagreb party bosses who were following every move Mihalić made and attempting to stop him working, in Slovenia as well, the Slovenes awarded him *Župančičeva listina*, and Zagreb's Školska knjiga printed his *Petrica Kerempuh (in old and new stories)*, a book which won the Ivana Brlić Mažuranić Prize. The responsible people in Školska knjiga were then punished by the party bosses.

In 1977 the Zagreb firm Znanje published a collection of poems (his own favourite) *Trap for Memories*, with a vehemently favourable review by Milivoj Solar.

Master, blow out the candle, somber days are coming.

Better count the stars at night, sigh for lost youth.

Your disobedient words might bite through the leash.



Mihalić, Novak, Šoljan



In the Academy

Plant onions in your garden, chop wood, clean out the attic. .
It's better that no one sees your eyes full of wonder.
That's how your craft is: there's nothing you can pass over in silence.

If you can't stand some night again pick up the pen.
Master, be sensible, don't bother with prophesy.
Try to write the names of the stars instead.

The times are seious, nothing is forgiven to anyone.
Only clowns know the way you might pull through:
They cry when they feel like laughing and laugh when cries rip their faces.

(Master, blow out the candle)

As well as work for his pittance in *Vjesnik*, Mihalić also did part time work for Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske (the Matica itself having been banned in 1972), attending to technical matters, as well as sub-editing later on, in the series called *Five Centuries of Croatian Literature*.

In 1978 Mladinska knjiga of Ljubljana printed a selection of four Croatian poets: Kaštelan, Parun, Mihalić and Zidić. Mihalić was translated by Ciril Zlobec.

In 1980 the Poles published a translation of his *Dream in the Light*, translated and with an introduction by Julian Kornhauser, a person completely unknown to Mihalić. In the same year *Five Centuries of Croatian Literature* printed Mihalić's selected poems as its 164th volume. The poems were selected by Vlatko Pavletić, who also provided an introduction; Pavletić himself was another one of the forbidden names of Croatian literature. This

foreword became the first chapter of Pavletić's 250-page book about Mihalić's poetry which had to wait for seven years before being printed, was at first pronounced uncommercial, and then sold out at once.

For years Mihalić was engaged in translations from contemporary Czech poetry, and together with a friend from Prague, Dušan Karpatsky, went through the same problems of the dissident. In 1981 Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske published *Night with Hamlet* by Vladimir Holan, which Mihalić, via Karpatsky, asked the author more than a thousand questions to do with the meaning, subtext, and the associations of individual verses.

In the same year Liber (Slavko Goldstein, Milan Mirić, Rade Radovinović) published Mihalić's *In Praise of an Empty Pocket*, which next year received the Tin Ujević Prize awarded by the Writers Association. "Is my persécution to be annulled?" wondered



Csoran's Spring

Mihalić, but by communist logic the Writers Association was a ghetto anyway, and everything was quite anonymous, not coming to the eyes of the public at all.

In 1982 Zagreb's August Cesarec at last published the bilingual *Ciril Zlobec: My Short Eternity*, an author and friend Mihalić had spent years translating.

1982 - 1990

In 1983 a surprise arrived from Skopje, a contract and a revision (full of errors) of Mihalić's forbidden poems in Macedonian (translated by Stefan Tanevski). The title of the collection was *Window onto Madness*, alter one of the poems.

In the same year, a collection called *Atlantis. Selected Poems 1953-1982* came out in the USA. The book was translated by people unknown to Mihalić, Charles Simic and Peter Kastmiller, and published by Greenfield Chapbook 61. Numbers of Mihalić's poems were translated into English and published in various reviews and papers.

Mihalić mostly published his poems in Zagreb in the magazine *Forum*, thanks, as he says himself, to the secretary Ivan

Krolo and editor Marijan Matković. Krolo supported and encouraged Mihalić, demanding that he bring him poems. *Forum* also published Mihalić's television play *Testament of Orpheus*

Science and Art, as an associate fellow. His membership had to be defended by Marijan Matković, who said to the poet himself that he had "wanted to save at least someone like Mihalić". It was only in 1990 that he became a full member of the Academy.

In 1985, Mihalić's *Petrica Kerempub* came out in Trieste, translated by the Slovene poet Marko Kravos. At the same time, *Naprijed* of Zagreb published his book *Quiet bonfires*, which won the Zmaj prize (thanks to Danijel Dragojević) and then the Miroslav Krleža Fund prize (1987). This bitter and defiant book was quickly sold out, but Mihalić would not agree to a second edition, because in 1987 he had a new book ready to come out with *Naprijed: Sidestep*.

In the same year a Mihalić book came out in Hungarian, the work of 12 translators: *Atlanticz, Valogatott versek*. The Voyvodinians had invited Mihalić to the annual book exhibition in Budapest, and he accepted. Later he heard that his book had been published in Budapest. In 1988 he was



With Dane Zajc in München

(1973) which Božena Novak translated into Polish and printed in the Warsaw journal *Scena*. Thanks to the editor and secretary of *Forum*, in 1983 Mihalić became a member of the Academy of

published in Priština too (selection, translation and afterword by Hasan Mekuli).

In the same year *Naprijed* of Zagreb printed *Selected Poems*, carefully cho-

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sen by Antun Šoljan. Šoljan's afterword roused the wrath of the putschists (it had been published in a shortened version earlier in *Forum*, in 1974). Only the great reputation of Matković, behind whom stood Krleža, saved *Forum* from being banned.

In 1989 Mihalić was visited in Zagreb by two Canadian poets, Barry Callahan and Greg Gatenby, bringing an invitation to a world poetry festival in Toronto, and an invitation to publish a book in English. The book *Black Apples, Selected poems 1954-1987* came out in English and Croatian. Mihalić was a guest at the festival together with his son Tomislav, a professional translator. With his relative Herman Mihalić he travelled to Monassen near Pittsburgh where Mihalić read his poems at Westmoreland College.

Very early on Mihalić's poems were translated into Italian too. Mihalić read his poems in Italian in Apulia, Rome, Florence, Trieste. Most of the poems were translated by Marina Lipovac-Gatti, a professor at Milan, born in Zagreb, who had published a number of critical articles in Italy about Mihalić. In 1990 Krščanska sadašnjost of Zagreb and the Milan publishing company Jaca Book together printed the book *Un passo fuori / Sidestep*. Klaus Detlef Olof, a university professor from Klagenfurt, translated Mihalić's poems into German. He worked slowly, one verse at a time, and years passed before the book *Stille Scheiterhaufen (Quiet Bonfires)* came out in Austria in 1990 (Wieser Verlag). After Mihalić had made numbers of appearances in Austria and Germany, the same book was printed three years later in Munich, by Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

In 1990, Mihalić received the *Goran Wreath*, and to mark the occasion Mladinska knjiga (Slovenia) offered to publish his books. Thus *Investigating Silence* came out; this was actually composed of two collections: *Mozart's Magic Coach* and the *Anthology of 100 Poems*.

In the same year, Mihalić became president of the *Goran Spring*, and did his



Mihalić and Tadijanović at the annual general meeting of the ACW, May 1996

best to make up for old injustices. From then on the *Goran Wreath* was received by Ivan Slamnig, Danijel Dragojević, Antun Šoljan, Anka Žagar, Luko Paljetak and Nikica Petrak.

1990-1997

In 1991, Jon Milos, Romanian by origin, French by education and Swedish by virtue of place of residence, translated Mihalić's poems into Swedish, under the title of *Fornuftets ruiner*, published by Brutus Ostlings Bokforlag, Symposium AB, Stockholm/Stehag.

Appalled by the hatred of the Serbian soldiery and its wish to destroy anything Croatian, during the period from July to Christmas 1991 Mihalić wrote several poems that were at once published in the papers (*Plane killers, For the Defence of Karlovac, The Deportation of Ilok, Christmas 1991, The Muses in the Shelter*) and that bore testimony to the awful truth of the war that had been forced upon us.

In the next years Mihalić wrote not now for the daily press but because of the rebellion of his own body and soul against the pressures from Serbia which were destroying everything that was human, free and spontaneous. This was behind the book of prose

poems *The Seductive Woods*, printed in 1992 by Naklada MD, which received the annual Nazor Prize a year later.

The rain is going up and down the island, it stops now and then. It waters in vineyard thoroughly, then it walks to the sea, makes circles for a long time, then it returns and spinkles the sheep. It creeps in somewhere, into an abandoned shepherd's shelter, sleeps for a few minutes and runs down the bumpy road, raises the dust.

Nobody is complaining to her. Not even a fisherman who is sitting in a boat in the middle of the bay. He is not raising his eyes, but he is asking: — Would you like a fish? She, the girl, rain, feels ashamed and flies off into the olive-grove. Pale as she is, but already with the signs of womanhood, she is trying to climb an old tree and then she gets sad. She is sorry that the olives are so lonely.

She unhappily goes on to the village, she has just become angry with careless people and she stops falling completely. Not a drop remains. Behind a cloud the sun appears, also wet.

The whole island starts smelling hard. (Rain on the island of Pag)

A Velvet Woman came out in 1993, a work that had been partially written before the war, partially during the war, partially heralding a new search. In the same year Erasmus, the publisher, offered to publish a book of poems in English. Mihalić wrote to Bernard Johnson, teacher and translator, who soon sent him a revised collection of poetic translations of *Orchard of Black Apples*, which was published in 1994, including a foreword by Ante Stamać.

In 1994 the renewed Matica hrvatska in Karlovac offered Mihalić the publication of a book of poems, after so many years in which Karlovac had been practically a forbidden city for Mihalić. The beautiful edition of the *Karlovac Diptych* (printed in 500 copies, it disappeared at once) is composed of poems that were published in his childhood and related to Karlovac, the second part being completely new.

In 1996 two sets of plans overlapped. The current editor of *The Bridge* Dražen Katunarić wanted to publish a collection of Mihalić's poems in German, while at the very same time Mate Ivandić, Mihalić's Viennese friend, sent a German translation of *The Seductive Woods — Der verführerische Wald*.

In the same year, Školska knjiga of Zagreb issued a selection of Mihalić's works, *The Approach of the Storm*, with a foreword by Ante Stamać, and an afterword: a biographical account by the poet himself, and a selection of critical reviews by fifteen Croatian literary critics about the poetry of Slavko Mihalić.

In 1997 Mihalić received the Vladimir Nazor Life's Work award. Today Mihalić is part of the school curriculum, more has been written about him than he has written himself (more than 700 poems), three whole books being written about his creative work (by Vlatko Pavletić, Ante Stamać and Tea Benčić). Mihalić shows his editorial skills today in *Forum*, the literary monthly of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is often to be found in the Writers Association premises, always engaged in lively conversation about literature, around literature, behind



Slavko Mihalić and Tea Benčić

literature, carrying on persistent and healthy polemics with writers, painters, free and engaged artists. In these early days of autumn as I write this, Mihalić is receiving the *Tall Yellow Corn* prize in Slavonia, getting his Collected Works ready, preparing for a trip to Germany for evenings of his poetry, taking care of a new number of *Forum*.

It is not necessary to mention that Mihalić is still writing, and that about Christmas 1997 we shall read a new collection of poems, *Pandora's Box*, published by Matica hrvatska. Every new book of Slavko Mihalić's poems is really in some way *new*. Because being different is his secret weapon, not only different from other people,

but different from himself.

What is the world? Five or six letters, of course.
What is the world? As soon as you see it,
it shrinks, winds around
the bitter questions,
it gets green. But steel, it is
not even a fish. It gets yellow.

The world is a sack full of

cats.

When you untie it, it is empty.

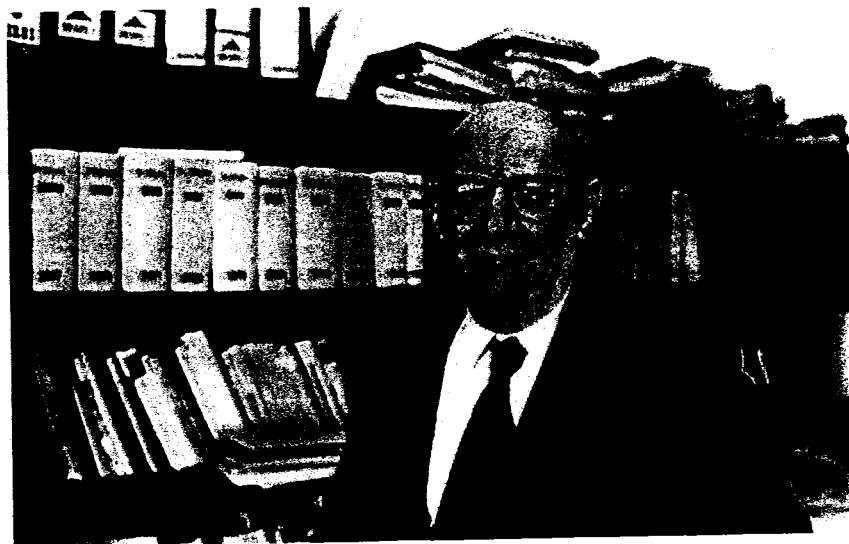
From the depth there dive out flights
of lightning-bugs.

So, what is the world? Do not worry,
it will come now,
on its way it has not reached itself yet.

(Flocks of lightning-bugs)

We shall stop here with the story of his life, but only for a moment. Because everything that follows, from the selection of poems, reviews and critical essays, photographs, is actually continuation of the same thing: a chronology of the truth of the life of art, to which there is no end.

Translated by Graham McMaster



In the editorial office of *Forum*