

Ivan Slamnig: When I'm Fed Up With Everything

(an interpretation)

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When I'm fed up with everything,
I swear, I'll go back
to what I left down there.

By golly, no more shall I go on
doing things I, so far, couldn't quit,
under the old walnut tree I'll sit
(much like under the one that's gone!),

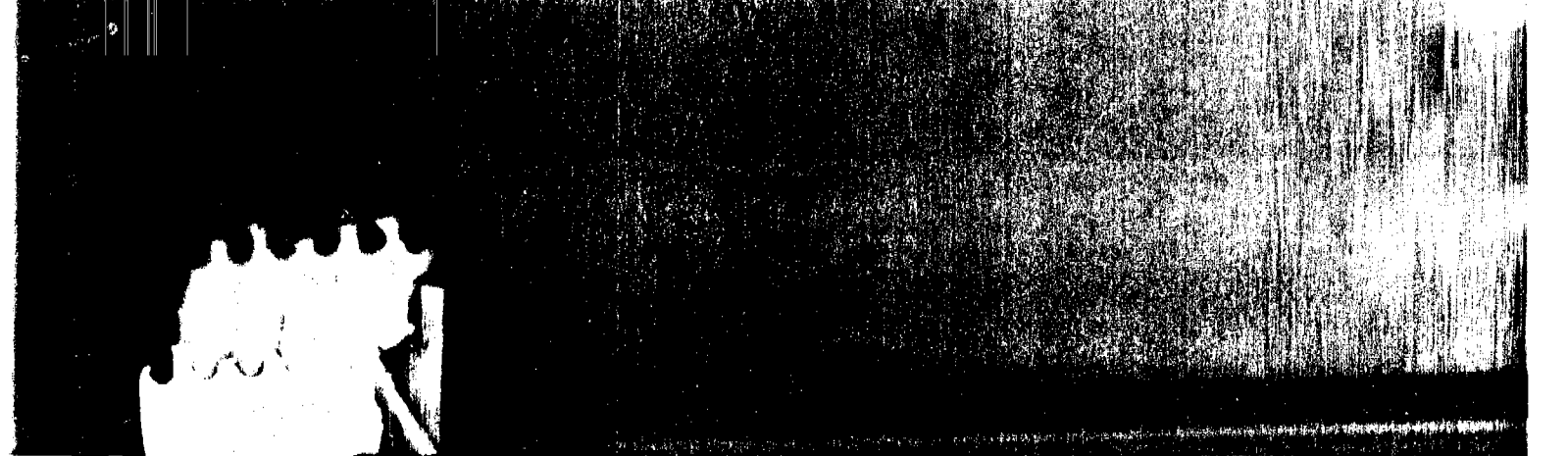
the table laid white will shine,
and there I'll seat, and there I'll eat
bread with the cheese, fish with the wine.

Ivan Slamnig's poems are readily identifiable on the setting of Croatian postwar lyric poetry by their basic attitude, by the distinctions of their style and by the characteristic and in special manner oriented layering of their poetical contents. The basic attitude of this poetry could be depicted as bearing a certain aloofness in relation to the subject matter that the verse celebrates and is most frequently manifested through irony. This is apparent in the author's choice of theme (which is not conventionally lyrical), in the angle from which it is observed

(the unusual aspects of previously celebrated themes), the lyrical subject's position (barely noticeable, polymorphous or ironically accentuated, and in other respects. Slamnig's poetical style complies with the aforementioned: it intentionally disintegrates the pathos of poetical speech, introducing colloquial expressions, peculiar coinages, forms and syntactic structures, as well as words from foreign languages and archaisms. The result of all this is that the poetical meaning of this poetry must always be read in several different directions and only when taken together is the resultant of the poem obtained. It is beyond doubt that one of the unavoidable elements within this complex is a specifically new attitude towards literary and cultural tradition.

In the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything*, however, all these aspects seem to be missing. At first sight it impresses us as being very simple and seems not to insist on opening a wide circle of associations at once. There is no basically ironical attitude present: it would in fact be more appropriate to say it is nostalgic. Furthermore it lacks the stylistic richness, so characteristic of Slamnig: with the exception of the somewhat colloquial utterance in the first line, as well as the colloquial »by golly« in the fourth, while all the other linguistic elements of the poem are mainly experienced as well fitting in to the linguistic norm. Besides, in the sense of poetical content it seems that this poem is quite unambiguous: it does not compel us, as the other poems by this author do, to follow various lines of interpretation. The conclusion that nostalgia is the basic content of the poem will, during the various phases of its comprehension, certainly be to some extent rectified, but will, let us stress right away, in essence be maintained to the end.

When we inquire, however, into the nostalgia spoken of in the poem, our first conclusion regarding its simplicity may be brought into doubt. Most readers comprehend this poem without an awareness of the complexities of the operations that brought them around to understanding it. Namely, the reader will quite spontaneously say



that the homesickness involved is a yearning for the Mediterranean, but will not be so quick in explaining how he knows this. The first indication appears in the phrase *down there* in the third line. Although it is spaced out, thereby immediately made clear that it refers to a special notion of some kind, by itself it is inadequate. *Down there*, as an indication for the Mediterranean, and, more precisely, for Dalmatia, when given without additional detailed designations, does not function on the whole territory of the language, but only in the speech of folks from »down there«, and only when they are located on the continent. The fact that this utterance in the context of this poem is also understood by others, has to be attributed to certain additional signals given in the closing line of the poem, where foods that are characteristic for Dalmatia and the Mediterranean are mentioned. The poem's beginning and end are thereby already inseparably linked on a level of verbal interpretation of its contents, and this is an indication that the contents are more complex than they might at first sight seem. Therefore it is first of all necessary to divide it into joints.

The lyrical subject speaks here of something he intends to do, but is not doing yet. It is not obvious when this will occur, but it is understood that his decision to do what is further described is very firm: he even swears to do so (*I swear, I'll go back*). He will go back to something that has remained *down there*, on the Mediterranean: from this point it is most logical to conclude that the subject in the moment of creating the poem was located somewhere »up there«, on the continent. After this introductory statement, the poem returns to the teller's present state, but in such a way that he continues speaking about what he will do when he is fed up with everything. We must pause shortly when we come to the formulation *doing things I, so far, couldn't quit*. The imperfect tense used is the only past tense in the poem: all the other verbs are in the future. Therefore it is as if this sentence implicates as follows: the subject so far had to do something,

and now he no longer has to, and from this we may deduce that the time of his departure is perhaps very near. And this somehow clashes with the indefiniteness of the moment of departure as previously emphasized. The second half of the poem is wholly dedicated to what the subject will do when he gets *down there*: he will seat himself under a walnut tree which is much like another one. Here we come upon the second spaced out word in the poem, and immediately we are struck by the difference of meaning in the graphical accentuations in two places. In the beginning, where the word *down there* is spaced out, it is expected of the reader to understand what the phrase means. In the second case, the spaced out word does not render attention to the content of the expression, but rather to the form of its application. The reader does not know that *one* (walnut), nor will he get to know it from the poem. For his understanding of the poem, however, it is sufficient to comprehend that this tree is of particular importance to the narrator; on the contrary, it is sufficient for only that to come to his knowledge, and nothing more than that.

It is good to already note two things. The first one is the relationship between the beginning and the end of the poem, between what the beginning promises and what the ending offers. Namely, the beginning is intensive: the lyrical subject announces that he will be fed up with *everything*, and immediately swears that this is so; it is accordingly concluded that the state in which he is in, is a condition that seriously affects him. It is therefore normal to expect that what will further be said in opposition to this (namely, the things *down there*), will be of an equal intensity and emotional thrust; but this does not happen, because in opposition to that *everything* from the first line we have a series of simple things: a tree, sitting under it, some foods. This circumstance is already experienced on the first reading of the poem. The second thing worth noting refers to the comprehensibility of the achievement: problems in understanding this arise only on a

lexeme level, and not on a syntactic, morphologic or any other; so that already now it may be said how to a great extent this precisely supports the illusion about the poem's simplicity.


The poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* is made up of only two sentences; the first being contained in the first triplet, while all the other verses are included in the second sentence. However it is easy to note that this second sentence is composed of several sentences with independent meanings. The first of them includes the first two lines of the four-line stanza, the second — the remaining two, while the last triplet may be interpreted either as a single sentence, or again as two, wherein the first line would be one sentence, and the other two the second one. The question that now emerges is why, precisely, does the poem have this kind of arrangement of sentences, even though it would, in light of its metrical symmetry, which is immediately evident, be logical to expect a different kind of arrangement. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to observe the contents of the utterances made in the two sentences. In the first sentence the narrator states his intention, when everything becomes wearisome, to go down there; in the second sentence on the other hand he enumerates what he will then do. This gives the impression as if the narrator suddenly came upon the idea to go, and he liked it, and now he hurries to have his say to the end. In the first lines of continuation he still touches on what surrounds him, stating that he will quit doing what he previously had to do, and thereafter he enumerates the pleasures he can look forward to. Thereby an impression of acceleration is achieved, as if the narrator is increasingly enraptured by the idea of departure, so he no longer needs sentences but only short syntagms uttered in one breath.

According to the verse arrangement it seems as if the four-line stanza is the central part of the poem, while the triplets represent the introduction and conclusion respectively. A closer inspection, however, reveals that the most active content is actually to be found in the triplets: in the first one the subject decides to go to

Dalmatia, in the second, it is about what intends to do when he gets there. From this it is simple to conclude that the impression caused by the stylistic and metrical aspects of the poem branches into two directions: on the one hand, they allow looking into the rational component which influenced the symmetrical arrangement of the formal elements. For all that the two do not stand in any irreconcilable contrast; their meanings converge on some old level.

We shall come to a similar conclusion if we observe the relationship between the content and the structure of the poem, namely, in manner or, respectively, the intensity of the utterances, and meanings placed upon them within the whole poem. It immediately becomes evident that a certain symmetry exists here well. The first part of the poem, namely the first triplet and half of the first quatrain, speak of the subject's decision, written from the viewpoint of a person who is not yet down there, who is still far from that down there, for this reason his decision does not sound very confident; thus the need to take an oath occurs. The second part of the poem is wholly dedicated to the things left down there: it here seems as if the lyrical subject has completely freed himself from what presently afflicts him whereas, thus the utterance is calmer and more composed. On the other hand, however, this symmetry is also brought into doubt by that same emotional impulse that breaks the poem up into two sentences only. In the first part, in which the subject is still under the command of the present situation, a stronger emphasis on the emotional is felt, while in the second part, towards which the entire contents are oriented, a slowing down of the rhythm takes place, if the aim has already been reached.

As can be seen from everything we have enumerated, there is a multi-layered relationship between different elements in the poem which are — as we have noticed — grouped around a pole of rhythm (emotional) and a pole of symmetry (rationality). The question that arises is what is the meaning of this dual-



Our analysis of the poem showed the existence of a confrontation of two different worlds and it is on this confrontation that the poem is based. It is now necessary to establish what these worlds are like and what is the result of their confrontation.

On a somewhat more specific level of observation it may be established that we here have a confrontation of the environment in which the lyrical subject resides during the moment of creating his poem (and this residence has the distinction of permanence, durability) with some other dearer and closer environment in the south. As an illustration and at the same time an instrument of this confrontation we note the use of two manners of speech which we have already mentioned, and which are already apparent in the first two lines: on one side the urbane, somewhat stereotyped speech, and on the other an utterance that bears the distinctions of the provincial idiom, thus designating something that is closer to the subject, and at the same time more lifelike, diverse and expressive. This implicates a conflict between two cultural traditions from which the utterances originate.

These environments, however, are not independent, for each of them — for both the lyrical subject and the poem — bears within itself certain symbolical meanings that are metonymically linked. Therefore, on a more general level we observe the confrontation between compulsion and freedom. There at the time of creating the poem, the lyrical subject has to do something (or more exactly, so far, he had to do something), while down in the south he will be able to do as he likes. For all that, it is interesting how the confrontation further progresses: while explicit mention is made of the compulsion, and it is the real motive for the decision to depart, the freedom that will be acquired through such a departure is not mentioned so directly, but instead the narrator simply enumerates what he will do when he goes down south. The more precisely emphasized, directly stated, thus more real compulsion is only confronted with the narrator's wish. At first it

seems as if he is sure of its coming true; nevertheless, the very fact that he will only satisfy a wish, and not achieve freedom, makes the reach towards the assumed lack of restraint much lesser than the reach of the concretely outlined compulsion. But, that is not all. On another level, the situation is just the opposite in regard to the circumstance of a clearly stressed compulsion and a barely designated freedom: namely, it is not completely clear what the subject is suddenly fed up with, what is oppressing him, whereas it is thoroughly explicit, on the contrary, it designates what he wishes to confront this situation of his with. The situation in the south is described, yet the subject's situation in the place where the poem originates is not described, and it is precisely that situation that has provoked the desire to go somewhere. From this point it is possible to bring conclusions in two main directions: either the motivation for the departure is totally irrelevant for the poem, and its principle content is the wish to go south in general, or else the absence of precise determination of the compulsion to which the subject is submitted emphasizes even more strongly the differences between the two environments: one of a coercive nature that cannot be clearly defined, the other, in which there is no compulsion, rather the subject's life is consisted of satisfying ones simple needs.

In an endeavour to decide on one of these two solutions, a more precise looking back into those very elements that are cited in the poem as characteristics of the south, of the *down there* that the narrator has retained. The situation is simple: there one can eat at a table with a white tablecloth in the shade of a treetop. The single motifs are also simple: bread, fish, cheese, wine. Two things regarding these motifs should here be observed: the function that they acquire in the entirety of the poem, and their meanings otherwise, outside of the poetical context. In light of the position that these motifs hold within the entirety of the poem, these simple edibles are obviously, from the subject's viewpoint, are quite sufficient to confront to

that vague *everything* from the first verse and slightly tip the balance over it; and this is understandable: these are common and everyday things, and simplicity is what the poem craves for, what the narrator yearns. On the other hand, bread and cheese, fish and wine are not just tralms of a simple and idyllic life, but otherwise, beyond poetical use, are linked to the Mediterranean and its way of life. These motifs, therefore, only by appearing invite a wide circle of associations, and in this way confront everything else with their Mediterranean, southern features. This is done especially by the motifs within the poem we are analyzing, because they are explicitly linked to the idea of the Mediterranean. Their role is, therefore, dual: on the one hand they symbolize the simple and idyllic life, on the other hand, such a life on the Mediterranean and everything else that the Mediterranean represents. The confrontation of two worlds is thus all the more emphasized: on one side of the pole stands something whose reality cannot be described even under coercion, while on the other end even the most common, everyday things bear a symbolical meaning and role.

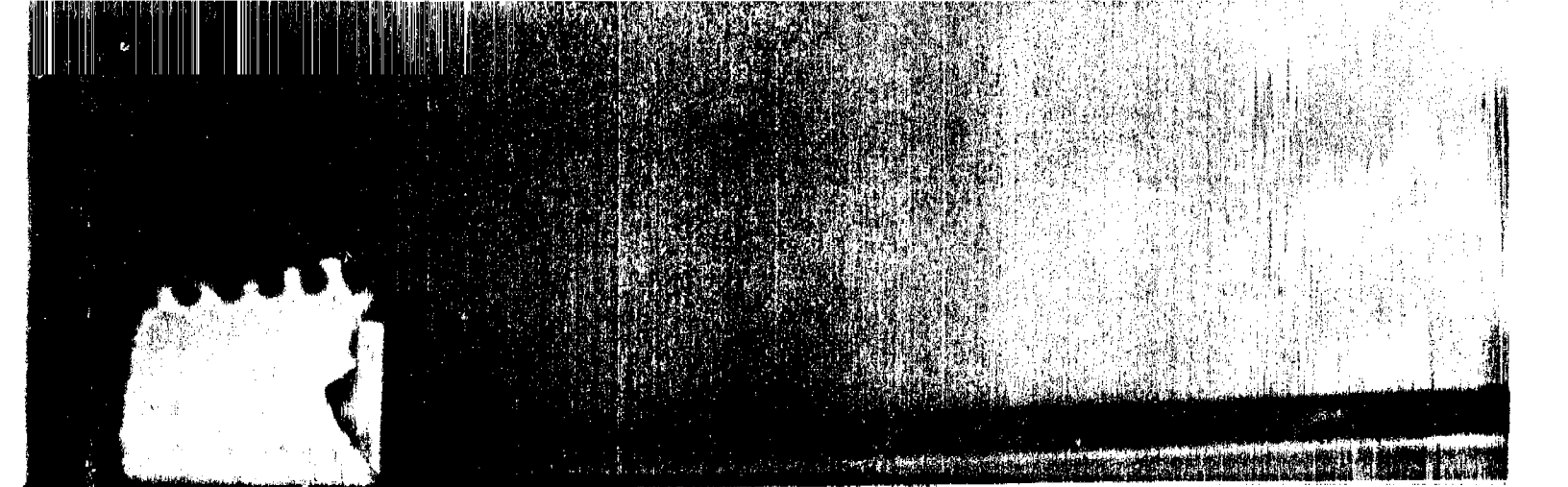
Only in this light do we more clearly see the previously mentioned characteristics of the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything*: its stylistic simplicity and the rigidity of its metrical structure. Namely, since the contents of the poem strive towards simplicity, towards common and eternal things as an ideal, it is logical that this striving be expressed in such an elementary form, that the narrator's utterances be subjected to such a striving. Namely, he wishes to show himself as a man from *the bottom*, in other words, a product of that same simplicity that he strives for; as such, he has elementary desires and expresses them in a simple fashion. Thus we arrive to the emergence of semantics in all the elements of the poem: since everything is submitted to a single point of departure which is the product of the narrator's viewpoint, and theme, and style, it is logical that its division into sentences, its metaphorical content and all the other elements which we have

enumerated so far, become functional and that each of them contains the same relationship towards the basic source — the strive for simplicity as given in the conclusive picture.

The situation with the metrical structure is similar. Symmetry is, in other words, the highest expression of clarity: it makes things easy to survey and easy to remember. The truth of this can be established by a simple experiment: at first sight it is clear that the poem would not have the effect that it has if the stanzas within it were not laid out the way they are; if it were, for example, organized versificatorily, yet retaining all its other elements (number of syllables, rhymes etc.), a great deal of the impression of harmony with the basic ideal would forever be lost. Since the narrator strives for a balance, it is logical that the balance appears between the elements in the poem, and the supreme expression of such a balance is this symmetry itself.

This symmetry, however, is not complete if we leave out of consideration its completeness on a formal and structural level, viewing it on the level of content and meaning. Beyond the limits of our analysis there remains still one more meaningful element of unusual importance which at first appears as one of the characteristics of the south for which the subject craves, but on more careful observation we discover that it is somewhat more complex we discover others, and thus its position is different. The point in question is, of course, the motif of the walnut tree that appears in the third line of the quatrain in the middle, as well as in the line that directly follows.

This motif differs from the others (the table laid white and the edibles on it) firstly by the fact that more mention of it is made than of the other elements. Its other features could be described as follows: it is, first of all, old; second, it is similar to some other walnut to which the subject is emotionally linked (the word one is graphically emphasized), yet we do not know whether it stood in that same place, or somewhere else, and which is also intimate and dear to the narrator. Thereby we have still one more



confrontation, which no longer takes place on a regional level, such as the confrontation between the Mediterranean and the continent (the homeland and foreign territory), but rather on the level of time, and in two senses. First, the age of the walnut indicates the oldness of the world for which the subject of the poem yearns, whereas the similarity of the present tree to some former one bears witness to the continuity and indestructibility of that world in the eyes of the subject. It need be remembered, in other words, that the world in which the subject lives at the time of creating of the poem has no distinctions of permanency; admittedly, the imperfect *couldn't quit* indicates a certain state of duration, but this duration is only within the limits of a lifetime, the narrator's lifetime, but has no universal distinctions like the one that is linked to the permanence of the tree. Second, the similarity between the present walnut with the former one bears witness to some kind of the subject's knowledge of the past and a relationship that he has towards it, a kind of pre-history connected to the environment for which he yearns and a continuity of that same environment. All this, of course, again in opposition to the timelessness of the space of the subject's abiding when the poem was created, a space in which he himself, as well as that space, have no relationship with the past.

However, this is the very place where we have to pause. The fact that we here mention a walnut tree that had previously existed, and that is gone, in the context of meaning that we have so far described, requires an explanation. It cannot be that the former walnut is being mentioned only for the sake of emphasizing continuity, for the age of the existing walnut itself points to this continuity quite adequately. Therefore we should call attention to what is said about the present walnut tree, namely, that it is *much like* the former one. If we here wished only to stress the continuity and the oldness of the surroundings, it would be more logical to stress the sameness between the former and the present walnut, the self-sameness of its substance and meaning both

for the surroundings and for the narrator. This, however, is not done, but the point in question instead is only a matter of similarity, on top of which the mentioning of the former walnut is graphically emphasized. This points to a solution: namely, that only the former walnut tree is the real one for the narrator, the one to which he is emotionally tied, while this present one is but a recollection of it, its substitute, its replacement. We could go as far as to say: the former walnut was the original, and the present one its copy, from which it quite logically comes out that the present one can never completely replace the one that once existed, but can only serve — to use Slammig's formulation in his poem *Vita nivelatrix* — as »a surrogate«.

Thus the poem's content now suddenly appears before us in a completely new light. In other words it is obvious that the tree of the walnut is the skeleton of the world for which the narrator yearns, for it is both a symbol of protection and security that the homeland offers, and a symbol of the entire region and its way of life. However, if the tree is in question (if it is but a substitute), then everything else under it is in question; it is no longer a certainty that the region for which the narrator yearns really exists. In that case the poem is no longer making reference to the confrontation between two worlds that really exist, but is rather a confrontation between something that exists (and which the narrator is fed up with) and something that no more exists in its original form, but exists only as a desire, as a reminiscence or perhaps as a hope; the future tense is used, not the conditional. In that case the entire poem would have to be interpreted in a new way, with all its stylistic and other distinctions: no longer as a striving to confront two worlds, after they had adequately expressed themselves, but as an endeavour to make one of them (the one *down there*) a recreation. The dualities, which we have preoccupied ourselves with in the analysis so far, would then turn out to be very functional indeed. Thus the fact that compulsion is evoked in one manner, and freedom in another would be explained by concluding

that compulsion is a part of reality, and freedom is a part of the narrator's consciousness, its own fabrication which came to be because of the very need to confront such a reality. The duality of the emotional and rational would also acquire a new meaning: the emotional is the product of the subject's present condition, and the rational instrument is the one with which he confronts this condition, his creation of the Mediterranean world. Thereby another essential opposition opens up, the duality, in other words, the real and the imaginary, of the real world of compulsion and the free world of the imagination. With this, however, the process does not come to an end, for a poem understood in this way disintegrates into a string of new meanings or, more exactly, new questions. We shall enumerate some of them: what is the relationship between the two worlds in light of the fact that finally both of them are conjured from the viewpoint of one mind only; if the present south is the fruit of imagination, was the former one real, or was it also but an illusion; to what extent can the narrator's expressive passion be interpreted as the fruit of self-irony? However, one should not try to reply to these questions: to the extent of it itself being aware of them, the poem counts on keeping them outstanding.

Thereby this poem becomes much more akin to the rest of Slammig's opus than was at first thought. The understanding of the poem will not be complete if we fail to include the elements of a broader context of experience, those elements that for an understanding of a poem do not directly enter it through its contents and structure, but rather through what its contents and other components of experiencing it link us. The reader, namely, on encountering a work of art, performs a series of operations that also differ from the ones which have thus far been described, and which with equal decisiveness determine his experience. Some of them precede the understanding of a text, some of them occur parallelly with the understanding of the text, and some again emerge subsequently as the text's logical continuation. On this occasion we

can describe them precisely as putting the poem into a certain context in three basic senses: first, as putting it into the context of modern poetry in general, which happens because we know which period the poem belongs to and that the poet is a contemporary of ours; second, by putting it into the context of Croatian lyrics, or more exactly, into that moment when the poem came to be, regardless of whether we shall comprehend that moment as something that exists today as well, or as something that we have definitely left behind us; and third, by putting it into the context of the author's poetical opus, in other words, by determining the position of the poem within the scope of similar works by the author.

1. That the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* differs from the poetics of modern poetry — from those most general determinants that are already presupposed even in the experience of the average reader — is clearly indicated even by a comparison with Slammig's other poems in the book *The Lane After Festivities* (Aleja poslije svečanosti) /1956/ in which it was published. In the other poems it is easier, namely, to recognize the connection with these basic lines which modern European poetry has established by the fifties of this century. Our poem, however, differs from these determinants in those three aspects about which we have, in describing the distinctions of Slammig's poetry, spoken at the start, namely, in the basic attitude towards the object being celebrated in the verse, in the style and type of meaning that the poem evokes. In other words, two traditional experiences are of utmost importance for the moment in which the poem takes place: on the one side, the expressionistic and surrealistic, the European, on the other side the Eliotistic and Poundistic experience, the Anglo-American, to which we should, perhaps, add the Soviet experience, which was highly appreciated in our country at that time.¹

¹ One should always bear in mind that Slammig belongs to the line of poets which, in lack of a more proper expression, we can call the *learned* poets, the ones for whom a knowledge of European poetry

As regards theme selection, this poem does not fit into the poetics of modern verse, but rather in its relationship to it. The motif of yearning for a simple life in contrast to modern life, furthermore, the longing for the space and time in which such a life existed in its purest form, may often occur in the poems of modern poets, however, such a motif would then regularly have the characteristics of a programmatic attitude, which can by no means be said of Slamnig's. Such a programmatic attitude also then includes poetry as a part of the things that should be restituted to simpleness; modern poetry in most cases commits itself to the term of reference called simpleness, thus the mentioned restitution to plainness is actually a return to the classic, and in such poetry we then have the appearance of classical reminiscences (Pound, Eliot). In Slamnig's case (in this poem) the situation is different: here, first of all, there is no apparent attitude towards poetry or any need to reconstitute it to simpleness; second, his poem is not written from a programmatic standpoint, but is seemingly a spontaneous utterance. In this lies the poem's complexity: namely, the poem may be interpreted on a certain level as the confession of a southerner who wants to go back home, without giving thought to the real meaning of the opposition thereby established, but only in reference to what this confrontation means to him; only from the second level is it indicated that this opposition has far broader implications, precisely because of the fact that its point of departure is a seemingly spontaneous attitude.

The stylistic component is closely linked to the mentioned. Its stylistic plainness, a semblance of everyday speech, is also something that was not unknown at the time of the poem's appearance: such strivings appear, for example, in the poetry of Lorca who had an extraordinary influence on the poets of Slamnig's generation². Lorca, however, like the other poets of expressively plain utterance (Apollinaire, Prevert, Yessenin) confront the unsophisticated style of their works with another component: the themes of their poems are in most cases motifs

with strong meanings: love, death, country, struggle, time etc. In Slamnig's case this is doubly different: first of all, the stylistic plainness is not counterpointed by the theme; second, the theme turns out to be complex and »difficult« only after a detailed analyzing and this is precisely the outcome because of the style in which it is presented.

For all that has been said, the poetical meanings of the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* are reinstated in a somewhat different manner than is usual in modern poetry. They are attained by different means and a different relationship towards reality. Thus the poem makes use of those specific possibilities of the language (more exactly, one of its synchronic sections) that permit the creating of symbols from the most seemingly ordinary everyday words (down there, walnut tree, edibles). On the other hand, the poem is without any doubts understood and experienced through a certain relationship towards the reader's knowledge about our specific situation in which a multitude of the population from *down there* moves to the continent in search of employment or for schooling and resume living there while they continue yearning for the south. On the contrary, without this knowledge the poem would not be comprehensible; and counting on it is something that is entirely original.

2. Interesting stimulations for an understanding of this poem may further be found in realizing its relationship towards Croatian verse-making at the time of its appearance. It was written in the very beginning of the fifties (1952), a time when modern poetry, the way we see it today, was just starting to make headway. The poesy that had till then been appearing was of a completely different trend: under

is not only an inevitable part of the development of their skill, but often an inspiration; he is, after all, one of our most prolific translators. Thus all the poetical experiences we have enumerated are indeed of relevance in his opus.

² It would suffice to simply look through the first numbers of the magazine »Krugovi« (Circles) — Slamnig was one of its editors — where an outstanding place was dedicated to the translation of the mentioned poets.

the influence of the social developments that it was dependent of, it regularly engaged itself in somewhat more generalized themes — predominantly of a far-reaching social, or directly political topicality — and in a manner that had the traits of the oracular, the pathetic, and in any case, of the generally valid and acceptable stance. The poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything*, on the contrary, epitomizes the standpoint of the individual and in a very pronounced manner: it manifests a content which, in its first layer at least, has no general importance, and does so in a manner shorn of pathos and the other stylistic requisites that had been in use up to that time. Emanating, therefore, within the framework of modern verse in a supranational sense as something that perceptibly from it, in the framework of national poetry it steps forward (together with Slamniġ's other works and the works of other modern poets of that time) precisely as the bearer and messenger of that modern verse.³

Within the framework of Croatian verse, however, this poem, from its thematic aspect, cannot be looked upon as something very new. On the contrary, the longing for a far-off, one-time abandoned world of one's nativity, in which everything is closer, simpler and deeper, is an oft repeated theme of Croat poetry of both the 19th and 20th centuries. It would suffice to recall Kranjġeviġ, Matos, Ujeviġ, Nazor or Tadijanoviġ, all of whom have dedicated some of their most significant poems to this theme. But this stance and this theme had never before emanated in poetry as contemporaneously as in this poem, at least not in any relevant way — and in any case — not in such a way. Therefore, the poem we are dealing with achieves two things at the same time. First, it establishes certain connections with tradition which, in light of the appearance of new themes and new poetics immediately after the war, were almost broken. Second, this link-up is shown at the moment of the poem's appearance (from our present-day point of view as well) as an introduction of something new, a turning point in the rela-

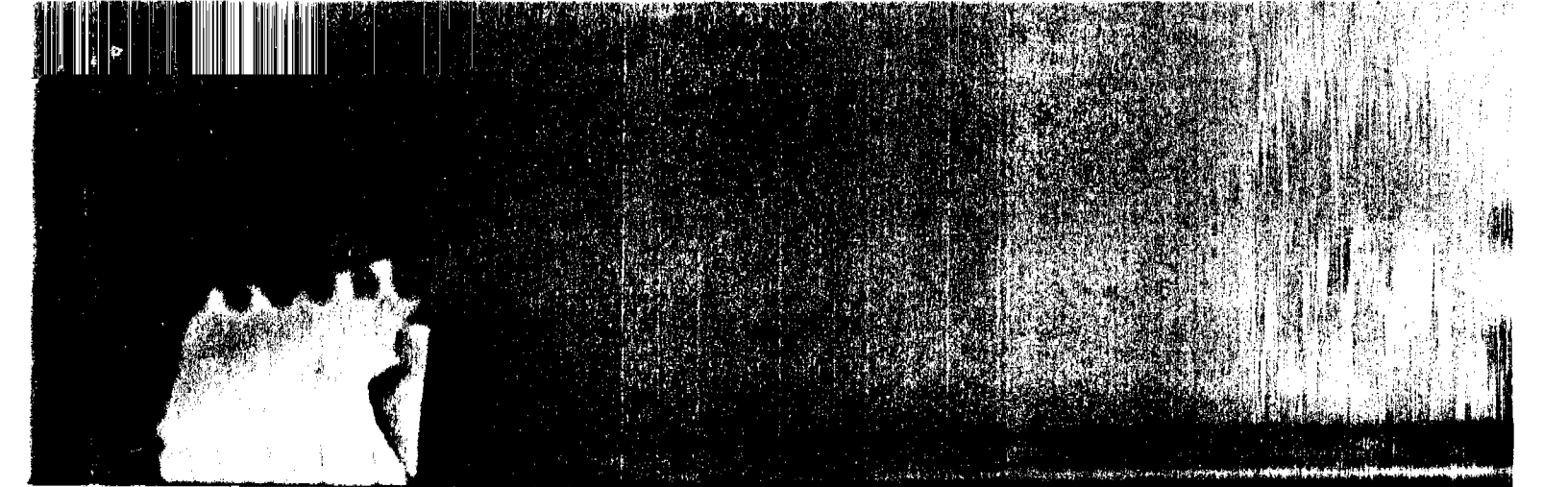
tionship towards tradition and a blazing of new trails in Croatian poetry.

From the older works that appeal to this theme, the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* is diverse in as much (so we have seen) as it brings into question the very existence of a lost idyllic homeland; it, therefore, does not persist on a return to the traditional theme, instead it brings into doubt both homeland and tradition. It thereby enters upon a specific relationship towards poetry contemporary to itself: distancing itself from it both by linking with some other tradition and deviating from that tradition, both by throwing doubt upon the existence of traditional poetic values and by a new faith in the power of poetry which, if it does not create new worlds, at least revives old ones.

3. Before we put forth question of the relatedness of this poem to Slamniġ's entire opus, we must first resolve a fundamental dilemma: should this poem be compared only with what appeared before it, or with the rest of the poet's achievements; for we gave the characterization of his lyrics on basis of the entire opus which, at our point of departure served as our foothold. In other words, although the poem *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* was written when Slamniġ was only some twenty-odd years old, the poetry he had by then created already shows to a sufficient extent the characteristics enumerated in the beginning (it will do to look at his collection *Analecta*⁴ containing his earliest works), while everything the poet did thereafter, to this day, is subjected to the same basic principle that can be found in his earliest poems.

³ The plainness of this poem is incomparable to the type of plainness which one encounters in previous Croatian verse, such as for example, in the verse of Tadijanoviġ. Namely, Tadijanoviġ, precisely through the use of simplicity strives to express «difficult» contents, whereas Slamniġ, with a slight dose of artificiality, seemingly evokes quite common themes that are not decreed by fate.

⁴ Zagreb, 1971. In this collection there are poems from various periods, from the earliest to the most recent, but nevertheless most of them are from the poet's early period when he was under twenty.



The position of the poem we ponder on as over something exceptional, can, therefore, already be defined on that basis itself. If we absorb deeper into the characteristics of Slamnig's verse, it becomes clear that its major denominator and mainstay is its straightforwardness. Slamnig is a poet who has no other program but poetry itself, and so he strives to try out all of its possibilities, with a maximum awareness of the artificiality of its nature; snugly fitting into the irony he expresses towards the pathos of the traditional poetic stance. Such a relationship towards poetry therefore includes not only the very complex poems, but also the very plain ones, such as *When I'm Fed Up With Everything* is. And indeed, Slamnig has other poems like it, especially in his later periods: (*We Are Black, On the Loading Platform, Bridge, A Roma alla romana, etc.*⁵), and all of them, the same as this one, fit very well into his poetical program.

The instance we realize that the analyzing of this poem together with the rest of Slamnig's entire opus is the only real method to take, we shall also then realize that this poem is a completely logical part within that opus, and by separating it from the opus is an illusion. In other words, Slamnig's poetry, in some specific way, accomplishes Eliot's ideal on the parallel existence of all works, regardless of the time of their appearance, wherefrom the emanation of a new work influences the order and meaning of all other works. In light of his earlier mentioned consistency, this is just the thing that is happening in Slamnig's poetical opus. Furthermore, in his case the appearance of every new poem arouses a feeling that it would be worthwhile to establish once again the truth of this order.

⁵ Poems, selected by Slobodan Novak, Zagreb 1973; some of these poems bear a simpleness of style, some a simpleness in their relationship to the object celebrated in the poem, while some are characterized by a plainness in both respects.