



If after a revolution men acted with the same dignity and commitment which inspired them while they fought in it, their victories would be forever.
(Notebooks 1955-1961)

Only idiots have their place in every system.
(Notebooks 1955-1961)

Man feels the need to determine everything, to draw a line. He is inspired by his passion for clarity as the true source of that activity which will help him create the world he dreams of. He has gradually abandoned nature, invented needs which do not exist in her – renounced everything except the advantages to be gained from her laws.

He is on his way into this projected world moving farther and farther away from the conditions of life. To create today for man already implies the loss of whatever was created without his participation. I say loss, because we have not overcome the animal species within us, because we can create nothing but objects and »works«.

Outside our world we can find no instructive scenes, or reasons for nostalgia: all the meaning is ours.
(Princip djela 1966)

My friend, beware of those for whom everything is simple and clear and easy; beware also of those for whom everything is complex and inexplicable and obscure – beware of those for whom this world has no latitude: they are always loud and intolerant! Side with the one who knows the difficulty of simplicity and who wants the impossible.
(Princip djela 1966)

People for whom we are not ready to risk everything do not deserve our attention.
(Princip djela 1966)

Vlado Gotovac, poet, essayist, philosopher, journalist and orator belongs to the generation of writers who founded the literary review *Krugovi* in the Fifties and left their indelible mark on the development of contemporary Croatian literature, introducing new urban subjects and experimenting with literary forms and structures. While many of them have in the natural course of time deservedly been installed as modern classics, Gotovac who was a political dissident, unfortunately had to follow a different course: he was separated from his peers, his name was removed from all lexicons and textbooks and his works were *erased* from Croatian cultural life for sixteen years. At the same time Gotovac – an indefatigable worker – was accumulating unpublished manuscripts, notes and countless notebooks, deprived of contact with a reading public, in creative isolation. In such circumstances others would have given up, lapsed into silence. Luckily for us, Gotovac persevered, knowing that his work will not be swallowed by time, but will survive as its testimonial.

He was born in Imotski on September 18, 1930 and received his elementary education in Prnjavor (Bosnia Herzegovina), Župa Biokovska and Lovreč. He attended secondary school in Prnjavor and Zagreb where he graduated from the Classical Grammar School. He went on to study philosophy at Zagreb University where he graduated.

He published his first verses in the *Tribina* review in 1952 and continued to publish in almost all the current reviews, cultural weeklies and newspapers. Along with poetry, he wrote reviews and literary and art criticism, essays, short stories and radio plays many of which were performed before 1970. Gotovac also edited the literary reviews *Međutim* (1953), *Razlog* (1967-1969) and the weekly *Hrvatski tjednik* (1971).

From 1955 to his arrest in 1972 Gotovac was employed as journalist and editor in the culture section and drama department of Zagreb Radio and Television.

In that period he published numerous books of poetry: *Opasni prostor* (Dangerous Space 1961), *I biti opravdan* (And Be Justified 1963), *Osjećanje mjesta* (A Feeling of Place 1964), *Čujem oblake* (I Can Hear the Clouds 1965), *Zastire se zemlja* (The Earth is Getting Overcast 1967), *Približavanje* (Getting Nearer 1968), *Prepjevi po sjećanju* (Versions from Memory 1968), *Čarobna spilja* (Magic Cave 1969), *Sporne sandale* (Controversial Sandals 1970) and poems for the portfolio of Edo Murtićs prints *The Content of the Wind* (*Sadržaj vjetra* 1971). In 1966 he published a book of essays *Princip djela* (Principle of the Work 1966), which was a cult book of the group of younger writers gathered around the *Razlog* review, as well as a quite unusual collection of critical chronicles »in search of responsibility«, *In the Everyday* (*U svakodnevnom*, 1970).

When in July 1971 he began editing *Hrvatski tjednik* (The Croatian Weekly), a paper published by Matrix Croatica, he could not know that this act would change his life dramatically, and that twenty years would pass before he would again return into normal life, into the *Everyday*.

This needs some explanation. At that time some proposed amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Federative

Republic of Yugoslavia raised hopes that the political system of the country could undergo significant changes. Many questions which until then had remained suppressed and unresolved were slowly emerging to the surface. The venerable Croatian national cultural institution Matrix Croatica was gaining momentum, gathering around its projects almost all the Croatian intelligentsia of the time, the discussions were centering around some vital issues related to the Croatian language and its status, the quality of the cultural life as well as the economic conditions. The aim of the Croatian Weekly was to draw the wider public into the process of change.

With a fantastic sale of 100.000 copies, this paper gained unprecedented popularity and political influence which the authorities could not tolerate. This is why the police seized the 34th issue of the paper, suppressed its further activity and started a comprehensive and brutal sweeping operation ending in the arrests and chillingly high prison sentences for the leaders of what came to be called »The Croatian Spring«. This was followed by a long period of almost palpable »Croatian silence« while the regime of Tito's Yugoslavia, in spite of growing erosion, managed to stay in power for almost two long decades.

Along with many others, Gotovac was arrested on January 11 1972 and sentenced to four years of prison to be followed by three years of denied citizen's rights including the right to state employment and the right to publish and appear in public. In investigative detention before his sentence was confirmed he wrote various texts and also kept a very special prison diary – a unique chronicle of his soul. More than twenty years later this prison diary was published under the title *Stellar Plague* (*Zvezdana kuga*, 1995).

In the Stara Gradiška penitentiary Gotovac served his sentence of four years to the dot, but was unable to observe the stipulated public silence after his release: before the end of the three-year period, at the end of 1977, he gave an interview for Swedish Television in which he reiterated his well-known beliefs. He was again arrested and sentenced on June 5 1981 to two years of prison in addition to four years of loss of citizen's rights.

It was only in 1990 that Gotovac was able to gain employment again: he was for a short time Advisor of the Director of Croatian Television. Soon afterwards he was elected President of Matrix Croatica (Matica hrvatska, founded in 1842). Vlado Gotovac is also one of the founders of the Croatian Social-Liberal Party. On the 17th of February 1996 he became its President. He is also serving his second term as Member of the Croatian Parliament.

The first book by Gotovac published after the ban was *Forbidden Eternity* (Zabranjena vječnost 1987) followed by *My Case* (Moj slučaj, 1989, 1991), *The Same* (Isto, 1990), *The Black Clock Hand* (Crna kazaljka, 1991), *Black Sails* (Crna jedra, 1995), poems for a portfolio of prints by Edo Murtić, *Waiting More to the North* (Čekati sjevernije, 1995) and finally his *Selected Works* in seven volumes, also in 1995.

»Events were forever changing my plans by calling me to new responsibilities. I agreed to the changes because I thought it was more important to take part in events than to describe their outcome – in polished books, *afterwards*; I wrote critical reports about history in the making«, Gotovac said long ago, and remained faithful to his commitment to the *Everyday*. At the peak of the aggression against Croatia in 1991 and 1992, when *Matrix Croatica* was celebrating its 150th anniversary, in addition to all his

institutional duties, feeling called upon to act as a free individual and committed intellectual, Gotovac gave hundreds of speeches all over Croatia, pleading its cause to the entire world. Reminding the people of their sacred duty to defend their homeland he also always stressed the need to preserve the values of our civilization and our dignity, never stooping to the means used by our enemy.

This was a time when he gained the reputation of a brilliant orator. Some of his speeches were published in the book *Signs for Croatia* (*Znakovi za Hrvatsku* 1995).

Vlado Gotovac is a member of the Society of Croatian Writers, the Croatian P.E.N. Centre, the Society of Croatian Philosophers and the Society of Croatian Journalists.