ISSN 1330–0008
CODEN FIZAE4

A MODERN RENAISSANCE PERSONALITY OF IVAN SUPEK

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I have the special honour and pleasure to address, in the name of the Ministry od Education and Culture, this Symposium which is organized in honour of Ivan Supek. I wish to stress: education and culture, as the activity of Ivan Supek covers both of these fields, as well as that of science. He is a great man of contemporary Croatia, a personality we all respect and admire. A man who today also celebrates his fiftieth anniversary of a consistent, firm, honest and courageous struggle through all possible obstacles of life. It is the fiftieth anniversary that speaks about his getting over all the barriers in the society and about his developing into a man of science and letters, continuously enriching his philosophy of life with new ideas, with new discoveries and new encounters both in our country and abroad.

Today, Professor Supek could also celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of not having been a member of the party of the preceding one-party regime. I state this as a rarity just for those who saw him in important positions, in many delegations, councils, etc. A man in such positions and with such prerogatives was normally a favourite of the definite party, of the preceding dogmatic regime. However, his entering the microcosmos, his early cognition of discoveries of modern science particularly of atomistics and of Heisenberg's uncertainty relation, saved him from being tricked by any kind of dogma. If any person with such a knowledge and such a vision could avoid the traps of dogma, of exclusivism and of intolerance with superiority, then it was the person we honour, Ivan Supek.

I would like to tell you here something entirely personal. It is usually said that many a generation had been under the influence of certain philosophers or of writers.

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In our case, I refer to Krleža and the generations influenced by the Krleža's circle. Many young people read Krleža's works, many of them neglected school, ignored learning in general, believed that an entirely new period was on the way, a period in which the only right scientific idea of the world was Marxism, a period in which revolutions would purify the blood of humanity, a period in which a great part of science could be thrown away as a petty-bourgeoise prejudice. However, I was lucky to be in a class with a few fellow-students who were, like me, interested in exact science, We tried to find additional mathematical problems because we had already solved those from the school books in the first month of the school year. Thus we came across the book *From the Antique Philosophy to the Modern Atomic Science* written by Ivan Supek. This book made a strong impression on us. Various problems were discussed there, problems of which we had heard only a little at school, problems which announced a completely new era, and secrets about atoms. But, instead of plunging into that matter, instead of neglecting school, as did some of our fellow-students under the influence of literature, we returned to physics and mathematics. I may say that under impression of that book, written by a man unknown to us at the time, we (I speak about a group of students that I have in pleasant memory) returned to the only reliable matter – to the facts about matter and to the matter of facts, i.e. to that what is exact and unideological. Maybe, in that book we found a grain that was sown in our spirit, for we, all of us in the group, remained antidogmatic.

As Ivan Supek was not tricked by dogmatics, my colleagues and myself, under his influence, were not tricked either. As a young man, I wrote one of my first essays *A Path Called Tolerance*. This was not just a formal title: it continued to be my beleif throughout my life. In that sense I have been indebted to Ivan Supek even before he turned to my field of work, the field of literature. Later on I followed his work with even more understanding, with more curiosity about his humanistic, antidogmatic orientation.

Ivan Supek is one of the greatest names of contemporary Croatia, being at the same time one of the most distinguished personalities, with widespread roots in scientific, philosophical, literary and other fields. His activity is much broader: it is a unification that touches all these problems, the most actual and subtle problems of our time. He feels at home among scientists, sociologists, men of letters and among artists. He can talk with all of them on equal footing. These are certainly characteristics of a modern renaissance personality.

I can't judge or speak about all of Ivan Supek's achievements. He made discoveries which enriched science, he founded the Ruđer Bošković Institute, he wrote text-books in theoretical physics, he wrote many novels and dramas, he educated a number of young generations and became their ideal. I would like to tell you shortly that he is also a writer, a highly appreciated author who shows a steady course of maturing, a writer who advances substantially in quality with each new book. This is one of those features that are rarely encountered in a writer, for he entered literature not as a young man, but as quite a mature man. His literary activity comprises his experience and his knowledge. We were not able to identify it directly, for he did not burden us with all that he was carrying in himself, but sometimes he succeeded in expressing his thoughts in a uniquely simple manner. It was always man's necessity to find a possibility of communication, to find a way to talk and to comprehend different opinions and even different civilisations and, finally, to overcome the situation in the world. This is well described by the title of his book, which should be understood as a metaphor, the book *On the Atomic Volcanos*. My generation, as well as your generation and you, have been living our lives on the atomic volcanos, confronted with continuous perils of global war and destruction.

After the Second World War we lived for a considerable period of time (almost ten years) under a very strict regime, behind the iron curtain. Our young men, my colleagues and those younger than me, were leaving the country by escaping across frontiers risking to be arrested or even killed. Many of them rowed across the Adriatic Sea to the freedom on the other coast. These days I had the opportunity to meet some of them in America and Canada. Today many of them are prominent businessmen or scientists, physicians and various experts, and each of them has his unrepeatable deeply moving story about hardships and temptations through which our generation had passed. For this reason, we should admire personalities who, like Ivan Supek, proceeded through these harsh times with highly raised heads, fighting their ways through and opposing the most powerful men of the ruling system. They succeeded in keeping their attitudes and saved both their honour and the honour of all those who saw in them the expression of their will, their wishes and feelings.

I should stress that Ivan Supek is a universal personality who took part in many global actions aimed at solving important problems of the contemporary world. I dare say, he is one in the legion of Croatian great men who tried to get out from their national, regional and from any other restrained space with the aim to solve man's problems, humanistic problems.

Humanism is in the basis of everything that I. Supek has done, whatever he has written or spoken, whatever he founded or established. Still, another feature of his personality should be stressed here, a typical Croatian characteristic: he is a peace-maker and a peace-lover! We were surrounded by many people who made dark plans for us, for the Croatian people, and who are still threatening us. However, in the nature of the Croatian man there is a necessity to realize and determine himself as an entity, in and out of his space, to ascertain himself as a humanistic integrity open to all. In this sense I think that the word peace-maker and peace-lover is not associated only with what Professor Supek has done, but also with those who recognized themselves in similar actions and who approved his actions. Experience, exact cognition, theory and even dreams and imagination are woven into the deeds of the man we honour.

Dozens of his books will certainly remain as a testimony, as a required reading to those who will seek something in them, something as an impulse or as evidence of the people of our cast who had been planning, acting and thinking here before them.

Universality and integrality have always led him in his work. Even in his literary work he has never spent time on secondary problems, but rather concentrated on the main ones. Primarily, that is the question of freedom. To what degree may a man act freely in a society? How far should he go when making concessions, and, when he makes them, how far should he be shrewd, witty and courageous to be able to do more for his people, for the mankind and, finally, for the principle of humanism? For this is the most valuable aim of one's endevour.

Fate of Two Persons between War Lines is the title of one of his novels. I think that Ivan Supek took a very risky and courageous position to be between two war lines, to try to do everything to transform these war lines into bridges. Hence I would like to emphasize that it is his great luck that he has lived to see the realization of many things he was striving for. The walls are broken down, the barriers overthrown (except here with us where they are built again). Tolerance, communication and exchange of views, of ideas and people are possible today also among those countries for which we thought still yesterday they would remain peoples' prisons. We all share this satisfaction equally with Ivan Supek, though all of us have not an equal merit for this outcome.

I should draw your attention to the fact that Ivan Supek chooses personages he was writing about with specific intentions. I think, by choosing a personage he was in his way making his autoportrait. Many painters paint an object, say an oak tree, and someone who knows to read symbols may recognize the painter in it. If someone who is such a scholar and of such a literary talent as Ivan Supek, gives his consideration to Mark Antun de Dominis, then we should be quite sure that it is done with intention. In this universal personality, in this particular, bizarre case, he wanted to show part of his conception of the role of a man, of a great man in a small nation. Janus Pannonius is another example. I was lucky to have the opportunity to read the manuscript of this latest novel before publication. It is a novel about his rebellion against Matija Korvin. I think that this choice was also done by affinity. I may say with pleasure and believe me, I am speaking sincerely, not because of this celebration, that in my opinion, this work tops Supek's previous literary creation. Thus, in recent years, Ivan Supek has achieved most, reached the highest level with a novel containing so many connotations, so many historical, not explicit but implicit cognitions and experiences, with intense lyricism and psychology, entering the deepest profoundities. Indeed, I can't imagine who else could write such a novel in this country.

Therefore, I wish Ivan Supek would further show his strong creative talent in all the fields in which he is creative. I hope that all of you will share the enjoyment I had when reading his novel *The Rebellion of Janus Pannonius*. It was not only reading and enjoying the style of that prose, but also comprehending the underlying messages. These could be a guidance to our behaviour in the present-day difficult times of ours, even in politics, for we must all act with great responsibility. I wish him to continue successfully his work, I wish to meet him everyday as my dear neighbour and early riser, as a man who never avoided his tasks and responsibilities, either social activity or in his family. And I greet him wishing him all the best with sincere expressions of my admiration.