

Boekmanstichting - Bibliotheek
Herengracht 415
1017 BP Amsterdam
Tel. 6243739

Culture in Balance :

Texts Crossing Borders

May, 1997

Evropski
Mesec
Kulture
European
Cultural
Month
Ljubljana
1997



VLAAMS
THEATER
INSTITUUT

BOEKMAN*stichting*

Studiecentrum voor kunst, cultuur en beleid



Herengracht 415
1017 BP Amsterdam
telefoon bibliotheek 020-624 37 39
fax 020-638 52 39
e-mail e.boekman@inter.nl.net

De uitleentermijn bedraagt 4 weken. Verlenging met 4 weken
is mogelijk, tenzij de publikatie inmiddels is gereserveerd.

De uitleentermijn is verstreken op:

2 - MEI 2005

23 DEC. 2005

Culture in Balance : **Texts Crossing Borders**

Background and information: a reader for the conference Culture
in Balance : Texts Crossing Borders (June 25 - 28, 1997)

Editorial Committee: Rudy Engelder, Dragan Klaić, Dennis Meyer
Editor: Rob Klinkenberg

Theater Instituut Nederland
European Cultural Month Ljubljana 1997
Vlaams Theater Instituut

May, 1997

Content

- 5 Introduction
- 9 Belgium/Flanders: 'My answer will simply change your question.'
Notes on Flemish playwriting 1980-1995
Erwin Jans
- 15 Bulgaria: Bulgarian drama in psychoanalysis
Kamelia Nikolova
- 21 Croatia: New Croatian drama
Dubravka Vrgoč
- 27 Czech Republic: Report from the Czech Republic
Helena Albertová
- 35 Denmark: Contemporary Danish playwriting
Liz Vibeke Kristensen
- 41 Estonia: Estonian playwriting today
Andes Laasik
- 45 Finland: The land that is
Vesa Tapio Valo
- 49 Hungary: Hungarian theatre
Anna Lakos
- 55 Iceland: Everyone goes to the theatre
Ólafur Haukur Símonarson
- 59 Italy: The situation of Italian playwriting
Mario Prospero and Nico Garrone
- 65 Latvia: "No more words" or what is modern Latvian drama like?
Baiba Tjarve
- 71 Lithuania: Some aspects of Lithuanian playwriting
Gytis Padegimas
- 77 Macedonia: Macedonian plays and playwrights on a long journey across borders
Žanina Mirčevska
- 81 The Netherlands: Beyond the bellybutton, Dutch theatre 1969-1997
Rob Klinkenberg
- 87 Norway: Current situation and contemporary drama in Norway
Kristian Seltun and Sven Birkeland
- 91 Portugal: Culture in Balance: Portuguese drama in perspective
Maria Helena Serôdio
- 99 Romania: Playwriting in Romania. The state of things or the things of state
Undated warning: "Customers are hereby notified we're closed until tomorrow"
Marian Popescu
- 103 Russia: The dreams of Russian drama
Ekaterina Salnikova
- 109 Slovenia: One-way Slovene communication with Europe
Darja Dominkuš
- 113 Spain: Spanish playwriting
Ignacio Herrera de la Muela
- 119 Sweden: Swedish drama in the nineties
Claes Peter Hellwig and Niklas Brunius
- 123 Yugoslavia
Tales of the dead: contemporary drama and theatre in Yugoslavia
Aleksandra Jovičević
- Colophon

INTRODUCTION

I would like to offer you two scenarios, both imagined, both true.

A playwright writes a play. He lives in London. His agent shows it to a number of companies, and sends it, still in English, to a number of directors and dramaturgs, and to his colleagues, agents and sometimes publishers, in several European countries. The writer is a good writer and the play is a good play. It attracts a lot of attention. The British premiere is in a small theatre specializing in new work, but soon afterwards the play is performed in a large commercial theatre. The production rights are sold to theatre companies in Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Sweden. Many other countries follow. The play is translated in German, French, Dutch, Swedish and many other languages. The movie rights are sold to an American producer. The director of the commercial production is asked to direct the play in Germany. He brings his designer. The playwright, in the meantime, is working on his next play, knowing that he has a few years without having to worry too much about money.

This is the first scenario. Now the second.

A playwright writes a play. He lives in a small town in a small country and writes in a language nobody outside that country understands. He sends it to the local theatre company. The writer is a good writer and the play is a good play. It is performed to critical acclaim and attracts a large audience. Large, for a small town in a small country. For the rest nothing happens, and the playwright continues to teach at a local secondary school.

In this conference (in fact the second that has the title of Culture in Balance, since there a small pilot meeting was organized in Antwerp in September of 1993) we will of course speak of translation and linguistic accessibility. Perhaps we will speak of projection of titles, simultaneous translation, and other methods to make the words of a play understood by an audience.

There is, however, a crucial moment that comes before all that. How can we know that a school teacher in a small town in a small country with a language that no one understands has written a play that communicates important things? In other words: what happens in the obscure months, years, decades or perhaps centuries before the translator starts his or her work? In most cases: nothing happens. Nothing at all.

There are three dominant cultures in Europe: the Anglo-American, the German and the French. More people in Europe speak or understand English, French or German than one of the many other languages.

As a result, dramatic texts, novels, song lyrics, newspapers, and the points of view they express, published in one of these three languages stand a better chance to be understood and to receive international recognition than texts in Welsh, Polish or Basque. Even Spanish or Portuguese are relatively minor languages in the European context.

Is this a bad thing? Isn't it something like rain: in some places it rains more often than in others, and what can you do about it? No, there is a difference.

Theatre professionals (and not only playwrights), whose native language is English - and even the French themselves admit that their language is losing ground, not only in theatre, whereas German seems to be the runner-up - get more opportunities to gain international recognition, more chances to have a career outside their natural habitat. If this is a fact of life, of nature, like rain, so be it. But

if it is the result of insufficient information or inefficient communication, we can do something about it.

In this Europe that we are creating, we have only one choice: we must recognize, support and stimulate national and regional languages and cultures. I don't have to mention here that this has nothing to do with black nationalism or separatist regionalism. However, I would like you to be aware of the fact that sometimes honest cultural considerations like these are hi-jacked by others who use them for their narrow-minded political purposes.

If we choose for a variety of languages and cultures, in other words, if we choose for a Europe of many cultures - and, frankly, we have no other option - we must make allowances for better, easier communication, for a smoother exchange of information, for a natural contact between people who do not share the same language.

To go back to the theatre: we should develop a way for playwrights and directors and designers and actors, for all those in theatrical professions where language is of the greatest importance, to know more about other theatrical cultures, to enable them to hear about the quality of a certain play even before it has been translated.

How do you do that? By creating communication systems that depend on people: informal networks of professionals, in which information is exchanged, ideas are tested, and collaborations are developed. Such a network is not a vehicle for commercial promotion, and even less for rampant cultural nationalism, but a place for discussion and the altruistic sharing of knowledge and expertise. "Culture in Balance: texts crossing borders", organized in collaboration between Ljubljana Cultural Month, Theater Instituut Nederland in Amsterdam and the Flemish Theatre Institute in Brussels, could be the beginning of such a network.

A few years ago I ran into an old friend from Sweden, a director, someone I first met during my university theatre days towards the end of the sixties. I hadn't seen him for perhaps 20 years, and he asked me about a Dutch playwright and director he remembered from those days. I promised to send him some recent texts and I did. As a result, this playwright and director has produced several of his own plays in Stockholm and is commissioned to write a new one for the company.

A meeting, by coincidence: fate plays an important role in our lives. But sometimes it is o.k. to help fate a little bit. That is, if we believe that interesting plays are not only written in English, French or German, but also in Norwegian, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Slovenian.

We can help fate. Cultural diversity in Europe must be supported and stimulated. An exchange can only exist if ways are invented to break down the language barrier. And a translation can only be made if you know what to translate.

In this reader you will find short articles about the state of playwriting in a large number of European countries, presented by authors with a thorough knowledge of the subject (and who will also participate in the conference). They write not only about plays and playwrights, but also about their international success (or lack of it), about specific methods of international promotion, and so on.

I hope you enjoy reading these short contributions, which contain basic information and make it possible during the Ljubljana conference to get right down to its subject, without long and tedious preliminary "tours d'horizon".

Rudy Engelder
April 1997

To help the authors focus their thoughts and add to the internal cohesion of the various articles we asked them to include in their articles the following issues.

1. Which are the important contemporary playwrights in your country? What subjects do they treat in their work? Which are the most important plays? Is there something like a common trend or tendency?
2. What is your personal assessment concerning the chances of the drama production in your country of being understood and performed abroad? Are the issues local issues, intended just for local purposes, or would the content of the texts be accessible for a wider audience?
3. Is the public interested in the work by contemporary authors? Does it attract an audience? What is the share these authors represent, if you look at the number of productions, originally written in your language at any time in history, per season in your country? And what is the share of contemporary playwrights compared with the total text-based theatre production in your country, including authors from your own country and abroad?
4. How many, if any, plays by contemporary playwrights from your country are produced in other countries with a different language? Do you know how these plays were brought to the attention of these foreign producers? Through literary agents, or because the plays were published, or via personal contacts? Or in a different way? In some countries more than one language is used. If this applies to your situation, how does the theatre deal with it?
5. Are there any professional organizations in your country that promote the work of your playwrights in other countries? How do they operate, and how do they overcome the language problem? What is their rate of success? To which governmental or other funds do they have access?

Belgium/Flanders

'My answer will simply change your question.'**Notes on Flemish playwriting 1980-1995***Erwin Jans*

'Irrevocably now: a pen leaves a trail of ink. I would like to find new times in that trail, or at least different times, rather than memories.' This is an excerpt from the play *Congo* by Paul Pourveur, which tells the story of ten men looking for a woman whom they suspect is in the Congo, and of a woman looking for herself in her own body, in her DNA. The striking thing about the text is that it doesn't really look like a play. The building blocks of classic dramaturgy - plot, dramatic conflict, recognizable characters, psychological development - are almost entirely missing. Instead there's fragmentation, mixing of registers, genres and styles, broken story-lines, an abundance of images and details: all the expression of a complex and obscure experience of reality. The language itself, with its potential and its pitfalls, seems to be the true leading character. Only when we reach the last page, we recognize something of a play: two characters, a man and a woman, have a short dialogue together. Yet *Congo* is part of the new Flemish playwriting that has been developing since the early eighties in the wake of a generation of dramatic artists who broke radically with the political theatre of the seventies and the traditional theatre of the established companies. A generation that started looking for 'new, or at least different times'. These notes are about the new or at least different plays that they wrote on that trail.

'I think with my pen, because my head knows nothing about what my hand writes,' wrote the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. The head which no longer knows what the hand is doing: a metaphor for a way of writing that wants to become physical again, ambiguous, evocative, expressive, associative, capricious and unpredictable. The play *Wittgenstein Incorporated* (1989), by Peter Verburgt - not by chance originally a film scenario and not a play - shows a thinker in search of the authenticity of his thinking. On stage he becomes an actor in search of the authenticity of his acting. The intimate relationship between the actor and the character is a fundamental characteristic of the theatrical innovation of the eighties. Probably it's the soliloquy which has given this intimate kind of dialogue its most meaningful form, which would account for the large number of them in the past decade. Apart from an explanation in economical terms that is, in view of the limited resources of the innovative theatre circuit.

Ward Comblez (1989) by Josse De Pauw, *Et voila* (1991) and *Ombat* (1994) by Peter De Graef, *Olivetti 82* (1993) by Eriek Verpale, each of them, in its own unmistakable idiom, searches through individual darkness, individual fears, melancholy and longings, often in a confrontation with the unusual, the unknown and the unexpected. A confrontation in which one is deprived of an overview or an understanding for the actor and the character. Instead, what is strange in everyday life and recognizable in things strange, is manifested. In the monologue *Vervalsing zoais ze is, onvervalst* (1992) by Jan Fabre, a female model, using metaphorical and repetitive language, enters into a

dialogue with the images she has of herself, and men have of her. What is real? What is purely appearance? This is a question Flemish theatre has been asking itself over the last decade, and which has not been answered, since it cannot be answered.

One of the results of that question may be the emergence of an intimate relationship between the practice of writing and the practice of the theatre. Plays are no longer only conceived at the writer's desk. The process of writing is founded on explicit dialectics between the writer and the theatrical artist, between literary inspiration and theatrical practice, between writing desk and stage. In many cases, the writer is involved in rehearsals which can provide a positive feedback to the writer. This new dramaturgy is supported and developed mainly by the newly established arts centres and a number of young companies interested in development. In many cases the barrier between drama text and theatre practice has been brought down, since the writer in question is also a full-time theatre artist. This goes for Jan Decorte, Josse De Pauw, Willy Thomas, Peter De Graef, Erik De Volder, Herwig De Weerd, Jo Roets, Jan Fabre and Jan Lauwers.

The practice of writing develops directly out of the practice of the theatre. Jan Decorte's productions of *Maria Magdalena* (Hebbel), *Torquato Tasso* (Goethe) and *King Lear* (Shakespeare) were symptomatic of a new way of handling the classical repertoire in the early eighties: contrary, ambiguous, distancing itself from a realistic and psychological representation of reality. The often super-accurate translations of Decorte displayed his great sensitivity to the tangibility and plasticity of language. The plays he started to write in the second half of the eighties (*Kleur is alles*, *Inondertussendoor*, *Naar Vulvania*) are full of cunning word games and inhabit the twilight zone between absurd comedy, unpleasant fairytale and comics. In his adaptations of the classics *Woyzeck* (*In het moeras*, 1990), *King Lear* (*Meneer, de zot en tkint*, 1991) and *Titus Andronicus* (*Titus Andonderonikustmijnklote*, 1993), he retained only the tragic core. Extreme cruelty and poetry clash with each other in an intense and lyrical manner of speech, deeply rooted in the expressive and resonant Flemish idiom. It is striking how many playwrights tap the vitality of the Flemish language when creating their own theatrical language.

Theatre and writing practice are also connected closely in the work of Willy Thomas, who acted for Jan Decorte. Both practices are notable for their openness to interpretation, and their attention to the way language shapes and misshapes reality. *Frans/z* (1985) is full of linguistic games and teasing, with references to other genres of writing. *B is A in Bubbels* (1990), a play Thomas wrote for children, also features language as an instrument of power as well as a possible means of communication. It remotely echoes the Kasper Hauser story. The language virtuoso A keeps the wordless B captive and refuses to teach her to speak. After a time, a naive, rudimentary dialogue evolves anyway, and the two figures are able to become better acquainted with each other's worlds. The opposition between nature and culture also forms the basis for *Duiven en Schoenen* (1988), an allegorical story. Its fragmentary story line and unexpected turns allow many different interpretations: the characters are lost in a jumble of power and impotence, love and longing. There is the inevitable motif of the quest: 'Here, in the middle of the unknown, I am their mystery. They are like rain on the dust in this city. They are on a journey and are therefore searching.'

Looking for new or at least different times does not make past times disappear. The more classically oriented dramaturgy retains its powers of expression, but has not really been able to link up to the renewal in the theatre. Hugo Claus, Walter Van den Broek and Paul Koeck carry on writing to extend

the body of their dramatic work, but it is only staged by the more traditional theatres and companies. Hugo Claus remains a versatile author, with his adaptations of the classics (*In Kolonos*, 1986; and *Blindeman*, 1985), his symbolic/realistic plays (*Het Haar van de Hond*, 1982) and his collage plays (*Serenade*, 1984; *Onder de Torens*, 1993). During the past decade he has also written several gripping monologues: the rather restrained *De Verzoeking* (1981), about an old nun looking back at her life, and the baroque *Gilles* (1988), about the child murderer Gilles de Rais. Claus's idiom moves effortlessly from the poetic, via the baroque and grotesque, to the popular and plain. Using these diverse elements, he depicts modern man's existence in a cynical way, yet full of humanistic understanding. Walter van den Broek's work is striking for its great social sensitivity. He made his debut at the start of the seventies with *Groenten uit Balen*, a play about the conflicts in a working-class family against the background of a big factory strike. In his *Tien jaar later: 't jaar 10*, he returned to the same family and made a sombre assessment of the social struggle. Van den Broek's style is realistic and recognizable, and pays a lot of attention to the popular characterization of the figures. This realistic, social documentary style is also typical of the work of Paul Koeck. With *De Aardemakers* (1986) he wrote a play about workers and employers in a failing brickworks. Tom Lanoye's plays also portray an identifiable Flemish social reality, though it is grotesquely distorted and parodied. *De Canadese Muur* (1989), written with Herman Brusselmans, is a tragicomic social satire, based on the structure of a football match. 'A football match naturally contains all the elements of a Great Greek Drama: triumph and bragging, infidelity and sensation, tragedy and community singing...the everyday life of the Flemish petty bourgeois, but also its ridiculous banality'. *Bij Jules en Alice* (1991) is the tragicomical story of the impossibility of communication between two people who nevertheless love each other. The work of Stany Crets also appears to be evolving in that direction (*Vrijen met dieren*, 1995): a combination of brutality and painful compassion in the depiction of the frustrations and obsessions of the ordinary man.

The ordinary man is also the leading character in the plays of Arne Sierens. But in Sierens's work he is not the object of cynicism, ridicule or parody. Sierens writes a sort of 'theatre of poverty': 'poverty is a metaphor for the fate of the poor, naked man in a frightening world', says the writer. His language is also 'poor' in a specific way: it has a popular vitality that's yet refined and poetical. His work has a pronounced epic slant. *De soldaat-facteur en Rachel* (1986) is a story about the terrors of the First World War seen from the points of view of two characters: a soldier who wants to leave the front, and Rachel, who is the 'femme de menage' for a rich family and is made pregnant by a soldier from the front. Both of them tell their stories in parallel. *Mouchette* (1990) is the touching, sometimes funny, sometimes bitter, story of two lonely souls, a young girl and an older man, who continually hide their vulnerability from each other. In *Los Muertesitos! Onze Lieve Doden!* (1988) and *Boste* (1992), Sierens mixes personal history with large-scale events: the first play is about the murder of Trotsky in Mexico and about the struggle of Zapata's followers; *Boste* presents Richard, a sort of alter ego of the author. But the play is also about the murder of Julien Lahaut, the man who shouted 'Vive la Republique' during King Baudouin's oath-taking ceremony. Sierens's compassion and his social sensitivity lend a universally recognizable trait to his characters.

The work of Erik De Volder is related to that of Arne Sierens in its social intuition and restrained language. De Volder also honours a sort of minimalism. His play *Achiel De Baere - Dagboek van een duivenmelker* is a gem. It draws upon diaries the author found at a flea market, and tells the story of

a loner. It's tragic yet ironic, full of emotion, humble but still impressive. The expressive language, which takes its vitality from the Flemish idiom, is a strong feature here too.

The dramaturgy of storytelling also forms the basis of the work by Josse De Pauw (and Peter Van Kraaij), in which epic and lyrical elements blend effortlessly. *Ward Comblez* was given the subtitle *He do the life in different voices*, a reference to the original title of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. It is no coincidence that this poetical work is quoted from abundantly. The story of Ward Comblez, the traveller in his own head, who is trying to forget his beloved, is a story in many voices. The fascination for travel, for nature, for things foreign, for history and for the position of the individual and his emotions in it, are all developed further in *Het Kind van de Smid*. This play is also composed in several voices from various sorts of text: diary excerpts, letters, speeches and narratives. The play is a small epic covering more than a century of world history, based upon the lives of two persons: the Child, born in America to an Irish father and a native Indian mother, and his half-brother Pomp. The Child goes through adventures in America, proletarian England, Ireland and in the prisons and penal colonies of Australia. Pomp, who has let himself become blind, stays in America and makes an inner journey.

The fascination for the foreign and exotic similarly plays an important part in the work of Peter De Graef, one of the revelations of recent years. In his fragmentary and elliptical stories, strange things assume a metaphysical tension: *Et voila* (1991) and *Ombat* (1994) introduces two lonely characters who both wind up in an existential quagmire when the boundaries between good and evil, and the rational and irrational begin to shift.

Two writers from the literary world have surprised us with remarkable plays: Stefan Hertmans with *Kopnaad* (1992) and Eriek Verpale with *Olivetti 82*. The extremely divergent writing styles are symbolic of the space in which the new Flemish playwriting moves. In *Kopnaad* we hear four voices in a partly grotesque, partly absurd and partly poetical language. Hertmans's starting point was the life stories and writings of several great German Romantic writers: Büchner, Hölderlin, Lenz and Trakl. The four monologues seek to verbalize an experience in the transitional area of violence, insight, vision and madness. *Olivetti 82* is also a gripping monologue, but the situation is more recognizable and uses simple, everyday language. A man arrested for the murder of his daughter's lover tells his story: an absent father, a heartless mother, the discovery of his Jewish origins, the murder of his little sister, the incestuous love for the daughter, and so on. The story remains evocative to the end. Do we know the man when he has told his story? Is his pain more familiar to us than that of Woyzeck and Lenz?

The quest for who we are never ends. Not on stage, not on paper. The pen carries on thinking the things the mind does not know. The answer lies concealed somewhere in the question itself, a compulsion to keep on asking. This essay began with a quotation from *Congo* and will also end with one: 'You ask me whether I am Marilyn Monroe. I don't know. I am not a set of answers, I am only a system that may provide an answer. And even then, there is nothing final about the answer. My answer will simply change your question.'

Additional information on the international aspects of the Flemish playwrights and texts.

Approximately 24 million people speak Dutch: 6 million in Belgium, 15 million in Holland, and 3 million in the rest of the world. History shows that the 'Flemish' culture has been suppressed for a

very long time. Flanders only gained its cultural autonomy during this age. Naturally, this has influenced the development of Flemish art forms.

As Flemish playwriting is still very young (after World War II), it is also fairly unknown abroad. Only after the artistic renewal of the eighties (see above), did contemporary writing benefit from the international attention for the Flemish performing arts. Typically, the new plays often became known only through the performance. As Erwin Jans stated, the contemporary writer works in close relationship with the director/actors. Often the text is written during the process of making a production. As the relation text/production is so close, the plays are hardly ever played by other companies in Belgium or abroad. Some internationally orientated theatre companies (Needcompany, Tg Stan, Jan Fabre, DitoDito...) integrate the use of different languages in their creative process, or create English, German, Spanish or French versions of their performances in order to tour abroad. Only very few plays have been staged by foreign companies. Most of them are plays with a fairly classical structure (Hugo Claus) or have been written for youth theatre (Jo Ruts, Ignace Cornelissen, Willy Thomas).

Besides the efforts made by the theatre companies and producers themselves, several other professional organisations in Belgium deal with the distribution and the promotion of plays: Vlaams Theater Instituut and Sabam for the Flemish part of the country; Maison du Spectacle la Bellone, Temporalia and SACD for the French-speaking part.

The Vlaams Theater Instituut is a centre for documentation, information, research and promotion of the Flemish performing arts. With the Theater Instituut Nederland, it developed a clear strategy on promoting contemporary playwriting by making available information on playwrights and their plays in English and French. The Vlaams Theater Instituut also gets or helps get contemporary plays translated into English, German and French and arranges the distribution of the information and the translations via publications. This is also done through specific projects, such as readings abroad and the setting up of a large network of contacts. The Vlaams Theater Instituut is funded by the Flemish Community.

Sabam is the official agency for regulating the copyrights. More and more this agency tries to develop promotional activities benefiting the authors.

Maison du Spectacle la Bellone has the same goals as the Vlaams Theater Instituut, but concentrates on the French language performing arts. La Bellone is funded by the city of Brussels and the French Community.

SACD is the French counterpart of SABAM. Both Flemish and French organisations work closely together to promote the French and Flemish plays in each other's arts communities.

Editions Lansman is a French language publisher of theatre. Although a one-man operation, it publishes texts from French language authors and texts translated into French from authors from all over the world.

Bebuquin is a very small publisher of mainly new Flemish plays. The texts are available in Dutch only. E.J.

E R R A T U M

In the article concerning BULGARIA (page 15) the name 'Bodriar' must be spelled as 'Baudrillard'.

Amsterdam, October 1997
Theater Instituut Nederland

Bulgaria

Bulgarian drama in psychoanalysis

Kamelia Nikolova

"Are we doomed to the retrospective melancholy of going through everything again so that it becomes clear to us, going through everything again in order to set it right (as if psychoanalysis casts its shadow over our entire history)? Are we doomed to summon all the events of the past to appear in court to investigate everything as if it were a law suit?..."

These questions, topical ones at the end of the 20th century, form the centre of Bodriar's remarkable essay *The Turn of History*. The answer to Bodriar's question is a definite yes for most of the prominent Bulgarian dramatists today, after the changes in the East. In this sense, they are a part of a common wave in Europe - the wave that desperately wants to revise the past, the wave of the pessimistic conclusion, of the "retrospective melancholy" that harasses Bodriar with its deadlock. He offers his recipe for overcoming the deadlock by passing to "another time orbit", which jumps over the end of the century without "providing the time for it to take place".

However, this recipe turned out to be impossible for the typical representatives of contemporary Bulgarian drama: the authors who belong to the generation that is now between fifty and sixty. Although they differ greatly, Stanislav Stratiev, Konstantin Iliev, Stefan Tzanev, Margarit Minkov and Tzvetan Marangozov have one thing in common: they are all obsessed by the 'psychoanalytical' passion to clarify the problems of reality. They do this by recalling certain events, crises and catastrophes in our national history, which is so full of contradictions, and by commenting on them. The subject of their latest plays (except Stefan Tzanev's *The Greatness and Fall of Stefan Stambolov*), is Bulgaria's present, which is complex and tragic in these years of transition in Eastern Europe. Yet while the present itself is of interest to these dramatists, it is important primarily as a starting point for a painful retracing of historical events. The present is the result of these events, whether it is the fortuitous fate of an individual or the national fate overall. Thus, the characters in the plays always end up with a consciousness of their national identity. Their biographies always revise and judge the national history as it develops.

A clear example of the "retrospective melancholy" of these authors is the feeling of guilt that sons have towards their parents and the sense of an apocalyptic and irretrievable breakdown of the ties between sons and parents. Surprisingly all authors share this motif, which explicitly shows the "modernistic complex" of the generation that is now fifty to sixty years old. It is the generation of the revolutionaries, the destroyers of traditions, the creators and executors of the projects for a "new life". The realization of the communist project is an extreme version of the modern "revolt of the sons"; it is its most effective manifestation. Its consequences bear down upon the sons, who have grown wiser. They experience a guilt that can only be expressed through masochism and is suffered without any hope of redemption.

The motif is ably mentioned in the plot of Stanislav Stratiev's two latest plays, *On the Other Side* and

The Winter Habits of Rabbits. The action in the first play takes place in a country where parents who have become old are no longer of any use and have to be thrown out of the window. The play is made up of the three monologues of "candidates" for a place "on the other side" of the homes they have always lived in. One of them is already hanging from the window, the other one is still in his warm armchair near the bookcase but may expect to follow his predecessor, a newspaper in his hand. The third one - a mother whose three sons have deserted her for a life in America, is in an even worse position because there is nobody there to throw her out. So she has to rely upon the municipality, which "never does its job properly" and takes care only of those candidates who "have connections". The play is in the post-absurd style typical of Stanislav Stratiev, and it sketches the traditional situation of the existentialist waiting for death, interlaced with frantic attempts at a "normal" way of speaking. The tragedy and inconsistency of an ill-conceived world that has no values comes out clearly through the discrepancy between the "normal" texts of the characters and the absurd circumstances in which they say them.

Stanislav Stratiev's second play, *The Winter Habits of Rabbits*, has the same theme of "deserted parents", but it is written in a realistic style. The defenceless elderly people are exposed to the vicissitudes of fate in their everyday life, full of chaos, misery, violence and brutality. In this play the image of the parents and that of the homeland come together in the form of the house. It has been built by several generations and left unfinished by the sons (who have gone abroad) and the cellars of this house "whisper" the national sufferings.

Stanislav Stratiev's way of writing is universally understandable because specific Bulgarian problems are part of a general absurd human condition. This explains the large number of translations of his plays.

Another remarkable play published in the past years is *The Lame or the Wolf Holy Virgin* by Konstantin Iliev. Here the motif of a son's return to his abandoned mother takes on a general meaning as a final return to the mother and death. A Man (the author, the human being) has had a car crash on the way home which finally frees him from all his earthly trappings - vanity, ambition, the rat-race. He meets the people who have somehow determined his life again. Among them are those who have directly participated in his biography, historical predecessors, and also characters from old novels and books and the black newspaper chronicles. The method of expressionist composition of the plot is masterfully applied by Konstantin Iliev, and the man who gets a new life by death is a truly free man. He roams around the infinite universe and on his way he meets lonely wanderers - projections of his own consciousness. This gives the play its form, and in spite of the Bulgarian character of the play, it is recognizable as European, aesthetically interesting to any audience.

At first sight Stefan Tzanev's *The Greatness and Fall of Stefan Stambolov* is a traditional history play. However, it has an unusual tension between the characters and is filled with wrong political actions and passions. (These regularly turned up our national history). The author's voice takes on the shape of a commentator who hardly disguises his bias, revealing the topical nature of this manifesto-like play. The themes of the guilty son and self-flagellation are present here too, although only in a circumstantial way. The play expresses regret at the fact that Bulgaria cannot give birth to a politician like Stambolov. Stefan Tzanev's latest play, *Feast during Democracy*, uses the motif of the forgotten parents in an unexpected way. The characters are named after important Bulgarian kings

from history. They have traditional Bulgarian names that have been passed on from father to son, but as time passed, people with those names have degenerated. Their tragic and grotesque images have been established while they were trying to realize and serve the communist project of life. This text could be defined as a political pamphlet. Due to their political topicality about concrete facts, the two latest plays by Stefan Tzanev are less understandable to an international audience when compared to the earlier *The Death of Jeanne d'Arc*, *The Suit against the Bogomils* and *The Last Night of Socrates*.

Tzvetan Marangozov's text *The Mushroom or the Reverse of the Reverse* holds an unusual place in contemporary Bulgarian drama both because of its subject and its form. It's a collage play with verse and prose alternating. It is sincere and sadly ironical, without any heroic or sacrificial pose. Thus, the text shows the most recent complex of the East European: the complex of the spy who has been recruited by the communist structures against his own will.

The generation of people who are thirty to forty and younger are not well represented in the general picture of contemporary Bulgarian drama. This is due to a number of important reasons which lie outside the scope of this short text. The names of Ian Dobrev (*Puzzle*), Georgy Tenev (*The Parts of the Night*), Boian Ivanov (*The Day*) should be mentioned here. Their plays are not based on the theme of the son who feels guilty about his predecessors. The existence of these texts is justified primarily by the ease and originality by which they make statements which have been repeatedly uttered in time gone by. This fact naturally makes them a part of the contemporary tendencies in European drama.

Margarit Minkov, with his latest play *Introduction to Their Picture*, remains somewhere between the two directions described above. This play is realistic and topical and at the same time it has existentialist sorrow. Here the son's guilt is reduced to private guilt because people hold themselves responsible for the loss of control over their life and for letting it become futile. The play recycles the national myths that are typical of the author's generation. In doing so, it identifies the state of spiritual crisis today and the historical fate of intellectuals in general.

All this presents a picture of Bulgarian drama today. But then there is Nedialko Iordanov with his plays *God's Free Birds* and *Goodbye till the Other Life*, who turned out to be a "sociable recluse". He has persistently tried to clear the way for decent theatre on the Bulgarian stage. This has generally been serious in tone, but Iordanov's theatre is intended for a mass audience.

The purpose of this article is not only to get the reader acquainted with a useful collection of the newest texts and tendencies in Bulgarian drama. It also aims to show that the limits of language are unimportant in the great thirst for dialogue which makes up the theatre.

Appendix

Yavor Koinakov

Text-based theatre is the traditional form of theatre in Bulgaria. Thirty-five repertory drama theatres and 19 puppet theatres have about 300 premieres per season. Because of this quantity, modern and classical Bulgarian drama have a good chance.

<p>Performances - drama theatres - 10654 (1995 & 1996)</p> <p>32% modern bulgarian drama 14 % classic bulgarian drama</p>	<p>Spectators in drama theatres - 2181 thousand (1995 & 1996)</p> <p>32% modern bulgarian drama 17 % classic bulgarian drama</p>
--	---

The promotion of contemporary Bulgarian playwrights in other languages was usually carried out through translations and personal contacts.

Until the end of the eighties there was a good working structure. A centralized Copyright Agency, The Ministry of Culture, Bulgarian Cultural Institutes abroad and the Union of Bulgarian Writers were good at promoting contemporary drama. During that time a network of translators from Bulgarian was set up. They are still interested, but no updated information is available to them. Via these channels even some plays from the '60s - '80s period and some new plays are promoted as radio-plays in Central European countries. Some plays of Yordan Radichkov , Stefan Tzanev ², Margarit Minkov ³, Ilinda Markova ⁴ and Nedyalko Yordanov ⁵ have had radio and consequent stage productions. A broadcasting convention - OIRT- is a good promotion channel for drama. It's interesting that many Bulgarian children's playwrights are well received - Rada Moskova ⁶, Vassil Aprilov ⁷, Pancho Panchev ⁸ Valeri Petrov ⁹.

The intergovernmental cultural agreement between the former socialist countries was an opportunity for some playwrights to reach the biggest languages - Russian and German. Stanislav Stratiev ¹⁰ is a good example. Russian translations and performances of his plays were followed by translations and performances in India and China. A Japanese translation and publication are in progress. Through German translations in the former GDR (Henschell Verlag) his plays reached German-speaking theatres and Scandinavia. He has been successful in a French drama competition and in one organized by the BBC. This opens up English- and French-speaking stages for his plays.

Another channel for the promotion of contemporary playwrights are the big European festivals. The Bonner Biennale of new European playwrights was an opportunity for Konstantin Iliev ¹¹, Ivan Radoev ¹², and Yordan Radichkov to reach the European stage.

Personal contacts between theatres are another important channel. Stanislav Startiev's comedies were performed in Bulgaria's neighbour countries that way.

A new theatre copyright agency ¹³ is taking its first steps in promotion, but up to now it has no access to special funds (government or public) to do so. The Union of Actors in Bulgaria ¹⁴ and the National Theatre Centre ¹⁵ are other institutions that can give information about contemporary drama.

Notes

- 1 Yordan Raditchkov - *January, an attempt to flying, Turmoil, Lazaritza, Wild grass, We - the sparrows*
- 2 Stefan Tzanev - *The last night of Socrates, The secret book of John, The last judgement, The other death of Jeanne d'Arc*
- 3 Margarit Minkov - *The chimney, The book of Kings, The Babylon tower*
- 4 Ilinda Markova - *The importance of being desirable, Last Tango*
- 5 Nedyalko Yordanov - *The murder of Gonsago*
- 6 Rada Moskova - *The cripple cock*
- 7 Vassil Aprilov - *The six penguins, don't touch the suitcase*
- 8 Pancho Panchev - *Struklitza, story about the rustic hats*
- 9 Valeri Petrov - *Word of the mousquetaire, Theatre, My love Puch, In the room at moonlight*
- 10 Stanislav Stratiev - *The suede jacket, Roman bath, The life - even the short one, On the other side, The bus, The winter habits of rabbits*
- 11 Konstantin Iliev - *Nirvana, Twelfth Night wine, The Lame or The Wolf Holly Virgin, Ulysses Travels to Itaka*
- 12 Ivan Radoev - *Miracle, The cannibal, The buffalo*
- 13 Teaterautor 49-2 Asparuch Str. 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria,
tel/fax +359 2 816 645
- 14 Union of Actors - 12 Narodno Sabranie Sq. 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria, tel +359 2 870 725,
fax +359 2 883 301
- 15 National Theatre Centre - Ministry of Culture - 17 AL.Stamboljiski Bouv. 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria,
tel/fax +359 2 878 922, 809 401

Croatia

New Croatian drama*Dubravka Vrgoč*

Politics have been the basic theme in postwar Croatian drama. They have provided the central perspective, determined dramatic action, the point of view and the direction in which the characters are heading. Melchinger says that the concrete origin of political theatre's historical themes is always to be found in actuality. If we accept his definition, and since "such a theatre always tends to attack, involve and interfere", recent Croatian history can be read in the plays written from the midfifties to the eighties. In these plays, the political code is responsible for the dramatic events. The protagonists are both "those who make history and those with whom history was made". The tangible political bitterness of the playwrights led to fierce dramatic tensions. Their main theme is the conflict between the individual and the political system.

This can be found in plays written by Ranko Marinković, Marijan Matković and Miroslav Krleža, which date from the late fifties and early sixties. These dramatists developed a way of opposing ideology by inventing and articulating subversive ideas about the position of the individual in society. Thus they questioned the rules that defined the social system. Their dramas were the first to show signs of diversity and present the new obsessive motifs that dominated Croatian drama until the end of the eighties.

A few titles: *A Rest for the Tired Riders* by Ivica Ivanec, *King Gordogan* by Radovan Ivšić, *The Palace of Diocletian* by Antun Šoljan, *Can you Hear the Pigs Grunting in Our Master's Villa* by Nedjeljko Fabrio, *The Purpose of Freedom* by Ivan Kušan, *A Nightmare* by Tomislav Bakarić, *The Master of Shadows* by Dubrovko Jelačić Bužimski, and *The Hawk didn't Like Him* by Fabijan Šovagović. There were successful grotesque paraphrases of classic texts - *Hamlet in Mrduša Donja Village*, *Satan on the Philosophical Faculty or Anera* by Ivan Brešan; there was the attractive dramatic enquiry into the sad destiny of a *homo politicus* in *The Apocalypse Riders* by Ivan Bakmaz. *Simon Cirenac*, *Cupid*, *Croatian Literature Exam* and *Credible Events with Dogs* were daring dramatic concepts of Slobodan Šnajder, in which myths, dreams, surrealism and reality were mutually interwoven, as was the case in Kamov's *Deathgraphy*, *Držić's Dream*, *Croatian Faust*, *Nun-like Silences* or *The Snake's Bindweed*. There were comic paraphrases in dramas like *Novella of a Stranger*, *Actiad* or *Domagoiad* by Tahir Mujičić, Boris Senker and Nino Škrab, which opposed the authorities' order that the place where the play was to be performed had to have permission, and that the play's contents should be vetted. Miro Gavran wrote his plays in which Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy, Maria Theresa, Antigone, Moliere and Louis XIV become contemporary characters. He thus placed himself halfway between the playwrights who took their relation to social reality as the theme of their text and those who explicitly rejected the dramatic treatment of political reality - even at times of political catastrophe. Gavran wrote *George Washington's Loves*, *Creon's Antigone*, *The Night of the Gods* and *Chekhov said his farewell to Tolstoy* with ironic detachment, liberally interpreting literary and other myths. He did this by using

the classical dramatic mode of setting up the action by introducing the theme only and reversing the place of the main character.

But at the end of the eighties, when a new generation of playwrights appeared, the collective obsession with politics started to dissipate. The loss of a clear ideological orientation created room for new motifs, symbols, textual structures, meanings, contradictions and myths. Young playwrights tried to escape contemporary ideologies, and ignored everything that could be connected with history or politics. They did so in spite of, or maybe even thanks to, new historical circumstances that presaged significant social changes and a break with the (pre) '40-'45 chaos. However, what's missing in texts written by young dramatists - who started publishing their dramas in the periodical *New Prologue* and in the *Dramatic library* of the ITD Theatre in 1988 - are ideological supports, dramatic aggression, textual insinuations, polemical tones - all characteristics of political theatre. For decades, the latter has been used in Croatian drama to illustrate what your enemies were like. The playwrights just mentioned created diversity, wiped out all former dramatic paradigms and created substitutes for reality.

Lada Kaštelan, Milica Lukšić, Pavo Marinković, Asja Srnec-Todorović and Ivan Vidić are some of them. They don't wish to give a direct commentary on reality or polemical dramatic answers to the social situation. They avoid authoritative monologues or entering into dialogues with the authorities; they refuse linear constructions, cause-and-effect sentences, conventional treatment of space and time, and consistent characters...

All these plays have structural characteristics in common with works written in an era when there was a first premonition of the breakdown of ideological systems. Great statements were no longer useful. The authors were often faced with a choice, at a time when the cataclysm of war and catastrophes could be seen on the horizon and indirectly entered the dramatic works.

In *The Dead Wedding* by Asja Srnec-Todorović, even the dead characters are participants in the action, along with the living ones. While the dead mother is having a rest in a closet, the bridegroom is proposing to her daughter. He's waiting for the winter, when he will drown the girl in the river and put her in the closet too. The mother dies in the autumn and the daughter commits suicide in the winter. "Is death painful?" the daughter asks her mother in *The Dead Wedding*. Death, a life after life, is compared with what was there before: the same desires, fears, hopes... the same impossibility of achieving unity. The main character of *Dangerous Dull* by Asja Srnec-Todorović reaches the conclusion that death is only a different way of arranging bodies in the landscape. He's blind and lies in his hospital room. He rejects any ties with the real world and communicates only with his doctor, who tries to reconstruct his life through fragments of sounds and images. The main character of *Dangerous Dull* stays alive only through his past, which he translates into the present.

Withdrawal and *The Swing*, both recent plays by Asja Srnec-Todorović, feature the motifs she already used in her previous dramas. There are the recurring images of a girl falling into a river, a child locked up, cold and filthy rain, darkness... It all makes for a repressive world in which people vainly try to find their place.

The play *Someone Else* by Ivan Vidić is dedicated to the Absent Brother. Every Sunday morning, the members of a family gather in a garden, at the same time and in the same manner, to repeat exactly the same rituals. They have tea together, chat, discuss the past, quarrel about it and say good bye to each other, until their next meeting. The only person with the function of a *dramatis personae* is

the nameless hero, the dead Brother. He materializes his presence only through his absence from their lives. When they tell a story about him, they sum up their own losses, excitements, aspirations, loves, hatreds, successes and failures.

The characters in *Harpa* by Ivan Vidić, are surrounded by a forest full of robbers and a war threatening the city. They are imprisoned in an imaginary castle. We see the clumsy master, a lost poet-philosopher, a dirty pig-keeper, a revolutionary, a scoundrel and the beautiful maid Harpa, who resists male lust. They all are fettered by their incapacity to change things. Although Harpa tells us about the revolution which will take power from the masters and give it to the servant who can't even articulate words or complete a sentence, she doesn't provide answers or a foothold to the characters.

In *Fever* by Ivan Vidić, three girls fantasize about going out on a Saturday night, wasting their energy by talking about possible encounters, but never leaving the room. The Saturday night fever turns into an imaginary journey and into a series of scenes in which the girls play different roles taken from the lives they would like to lead. That way they create a new reality, different and much more interesting than the one they have.

Lada Kaštelan's *Alcestis*, which is Euripides' tragedy about illusion transformed into actuality, offers no historical hope either. Lada Kaštelan's mythical world is an uncertain place, where the Gods can't help us and where events determine destiny. In the fixed order of values, there is nothing more powerful than they, the choir says. In *Alcestis*, as in other plays by young Croatian playwrights, the dead take on the roles of the living, and the living call out for help to the dead, making the line between life and death almost invisible.

The Last Ring by Lada Kaštelan triggers memories too, and brings back events that happened in 1944 and 1971. She gives them a present day parallel to the original period. Three women, a daughter, her mother and her grandmother, meet on the former's 36th birthday. From their personal perspective, each of them retells her private tragedy that stems from the damnation of her historical situation. By cyclically repeating joint destinies and political troubles, *The Last Ring* tells us how a person in our country is unable to help himself forward.

From a different perspective, Pavo Marinković actualizes almost the same problems as the rest of the young dramatists. Marinković has written his plays *Philip Octetes* and *A Magic Trumpet* as an answer to Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, which he views as a history play. Into Sophocles's dramatic structure about acquired and imposed solitude, Marinković has introduced a modern feeling of loneliness as the root of man's existence. While according to Sophocles, loneliness is the sphere that belongs to the hero, for Marinković it is the climate that poor little swindlers have to live in. *Philoctetes* has been pushed into loneliness, *Octetes* had always been in it. With ironic mockery, Marinković focuses on the destiny of the hero who eventually gives up his trumpet and agrees to the conformism of his era, without any fear or regret. "My *Philoctetes* doesn't belong to any time; he can be both a partisan and a Greek hero", says Marinković.

Disamena's Honour by Pavo Marinković mocks the heroism of Gideon, a fictitious Greek hero. The tragic destiny which he borrowed from Greek tragedy has been turned into a comedy by means of irony and parody, and none of the values in the newly established order manages to survive. The tragic structure has been used to present the superficial reality of today. The characters have been transformed to present-day heroes and made funny, thus destroying the memory of myths.

In his *Glorietta*, Pavo Marinković debunks another myth. *Glorietta* can be read as a revision of *Gloria* by Ranko Marinković. As in plays I mentioned earlier, this play too works through fragmenting memory, and by alternating the past and the present. During the war, a clown, a knife-thrower and a female trapeze artist take refuge in a humble circus. After waiting for salvation, and hoping that some day someone will come to take her out of the circus and offer her a better life, Gloria ends up at a small train station, covering her face with her hands, lying on the ground, sobbing quietly. In the anthropological melodrama *The Hunt of Tepišar Bear* by Milica Lukšić, the language of old Croatian literature is interwoven with the language of the street and with phrases borrowed from daily politics. Simultaneously, the archetype situation is mixed with the mythology of urban life. At an imaginary Wild Border, Milica Lukšić brings together a hunter from Musland, and Rakija, a man from the Wild East. They start to hunt the genetically modified bear Tepišar. The play is a literary analysis of our mentalities presented in a new language which is the product of recycled linguistic idiom. It is also a commentary on the threats which reality poses. Ironic detachment and parody of the familiar literary models result in an amazing unity. The way the exposition is handled for instance, draws a parallel between westerns and the situation in Croatia at the beginning of the nineties.

I have selected authors whose works respond to contemporary sensibility and the post-modern times, but there are some other dramatists, like Mate Matišić (*Cinco* and *Marinko*, *Glittering of the Golden Tooth*, *The Angels of Babylon*), Borivoj Radaković (*Welcome to the Blue Hell*) or Zvonimir Zoričić (*Tartar Beefsteak* and *The Winning Combination*), who kept on writing within the inertia of realism.

The plays by Ivan Vidić, Asja Srnc-Todorović, Lada Kaštelan, Pavo Marinković and Milica Lukšić are not about the opposition of two persons, but about binary oppositions like life/death, man/woman, active/passive, presence/absence... Classical contradictions are not taken as an opposition, but simply as things that exist. Instead of persons, these plays feature language, which can be defined as constant insecurity. The main character is in danger because he's fragmented and can't find his identity. He feels cast aside, and is fruitlessly trying to get his wish realized. Thus he too falls victim to wishful thinking, reinforcing his unimportant position in the world.

Croatian dramatists of the '90s use this subject to reflect some contemporary European drama topics like the complex of feeling lonely, the prediction of catastrophe and the ultimate alienation. Instead of time, these dramas possess only duration, as the past, the future and the present are realized at virtually the same moment. Space loses its stability and becomes changeable. That is why many contemporary Croatian plays show an empty space.

Although most of the dramas reflect the traumatic reality of war, which gives them some local characteristics, they reflect the models of most up-to-date literary theories. The most recent Croatian plays are like a negative current in a process of destruction, in which fragments of disintegrated sentences illustrate the state of loneliness. They show us the state of our spirits right now, and their motifs and themes are universal. From this perspective, I think that contemporary Croatian drama would be understandable to audiences in other European and world cities.

Most of the plays mentioned above were performed at Croatian theatres. Dramas by Ivo Brešan, Slobodan Šnajder, Ivan Bakmaz, Ivan Kušan, Antun Šoljan, Mujičić-Senker-Škrabe, written in the seventies and eighties were staged at numerous Croatian theatres. *Harpa* by Ivan Vidić has been done at the Zagreb Youth Theatre; *The Dead Wedding* and *The Swing* by Asja Srnc-Todorović, *Fever*

by Ivan Vidić, *Glorietta*, *Philip Octetes* and *The Magic Trumpet* by Pavo Marinković as well as *The Hunt of Tepišar bear* by Milica Lukšić were first performed in the Zagreb ITD Theatre. *The Last Ring*, which got a script award in 1995, was staged at the Gavella Dramatic Theatre in Zagreb. Most of these plays were directed by young directors and a young audience has received them extremely well. These plays stay in the repertoire for three or four years, which doesn't happen that often, not even with world-famous playwrights. Forty percent of the plays produced are Croatian and 20% are contemporary works. In the last four years, the Ministry of Culture has introduced annual competitions, stimulating the development of the contemporary domestic drama. It has also given money to theatres staging award-winning plays. By doing so, the number of performances based on scripts by contemporary Croatian dramatist went up within a year.

In the seventies and eighties, Ivo Brešan's comedies were performed in numerous European cities. The National Theatre of Bretagne in Rennes has recently staged Asja Srnec's *The Dead Wedding*, directed by the French director Christian Colin, while Slobodan Šnajder's plays have been performed in several European theatres: *The Croatian Faust* was directed by Roberto Ciulli at the Theater an der Ruhr in Mulheim in 1987. It was also done at the Vienna Burgtheater in 1993, directed by Hans Holman. Šnajder's *The Snake's Bindweed* was staged at the Landestheater in Tübingen in 1995, and in 1996 at the National Theatre in Oslo, the Dionysus festival in Veroli (Italy), the Schauspielhaus in Frankfurt am Main, the Theater an der Ruhr in Mulheim and the Vienna GMBH theatre. Slobodan Šnajder's drama *The Comfort of the North Seas* was staged at the Heinrich von Kleist Theatre in Frankfurt upon Odra.

After the French premiere in Rennes, *The Dead Wedding*, performed by Croatian artists in both Croatian and French, was staged in Zagreb. The French audience was very interested. Slobodan Šnajder's plays, which mirror our life during politically significant periods, were translated into German, English and Norwegian, and have been extremely well received everywhere. Šnajder got his plays presented abroad, thanks to a private agent and in response to the wishes from the European theatres, without any financial help from the state.

Right now there is no professional organization in Croatia that promotes Croatian drama abroad. The plays are generally translated at the author's expense. The plays of the youngest Croatian dramatists are rarely translated at all. The state sometimes subsidizes an individual tour of a Croatian theatre abroad, but in general there is no systematic funding for the international promotion of contemporary Croatian drama.

Czech Republic

Report from the Czech Republic*Helena Albertová*

1/ Which are the important contemporary playwrights in your country? What subjects do they treat in their work? Which are the most important plays? Is there something like a common trend or tendency?

I will write about contemporary, living authors. The problem is that once a work of a contemporary author becomes a part of the national dramatic heritage, it starts to live a life of its own. A theatre may produce an author's older plays, but ignore his latest work. Or else only one of his plays is performed. The space available for this treatise prevents me from specifying individual authors. The oldest generation of Czech dramatists includes: František Pavlíček (b. 1923), Oldřich Danek (b. 1927), Pavel Kohout (b. 1928) and Jiří Hubač (b. 1929).

The middle (older) generation is the most numerous: Ivan Klima (b. 1931), Ladislav Smoček (b. 1932), Milan Uhde (b. 1935), Josef Topol (b. 1935), Antonín Máša (b. 1935), Antonín Přidal (b. 1935), Václav Havel (b. 1936), Pavel Landovsky (b. 1936), Michal Lázňovský (b. 1941), Helena Albertová (1941), Arnošt Goldflam (b. 1946), Karel Steigerwald (b. 1946), Daniela Fischerová (b. 1947) and Vera Eliášková (b. 1949).

The middle (younger) generation consists of: Antonin Procházka (b. 1953), Přemysl Rut (b. 1954) and J.A.Pitinský (b. 1956).

Then there's the youngest generation: Lenka Lagronová (b. 1963), David Drábek (b. 1970), Markéta Bláhová (b. 1970) and Egon Tobiaš (b. 1971).

Finally there are the authors of just one play that got considerable response - the actor Jan Kraus (b. 1953) and Tomáš Rychetský (b. 1962).

Furthermore, there are some authors whose work is closely connected with the theatre they write and play in: Jiří Suchý, poet and lyric writer who runs the Semafor Theatre in Prague; Zdenek Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak, founders, directors and actors of the Jára Cimrman Theatre in Prague; and Jan Schmid, artist, actor and director of the Y Studio in Prague.

Unfortunately, I'm not able to discuss the authors of plays for puppet and children's theatre.

First, I'll try to characterize briefly how plays were produced in the recent past. In the twenty-five years we've just gone through, it was common to divide playwrights into authors who were "allowed", authors who were "allowed only a little and in certain places" and, finally, into those who were "not allowed at all": the dissidents and emigrés. Many plays by these forbidden authors were staged under borrowed pseudonyms. This depended on the courage of the theatre and on their ability to keep it secret.

Today this censorship and the persecution of authors have disappeared. Anyone can write what he or she wants in any way he wants it. Yet the golden age of the Czech drama that was predicted has so far not come about. Authors were faced with a new and unfamiliar situation. The frame of reference

with its excellent, good and poorer plays, collapsed: the common and clearly defined enemy - the totalitarian system and its practices - disappeared. Only now, in retrospect, are we able to see that all the plays - whether they have a tragic, absurd or farcical form, or whether they are veiled in allegory or history - repeated one model: the hero gets gnawed by the cogwheels of power due to his own fault or under pressure of circumstance. He defends himself, resists, and his character is tested. Finally he is forced into some form of collaboration and struggles with his conscience - and then there are only two possible solutions: he either breaks down under the pressure and adapts to the system, or he is excommunicated and physically destroyed.

This model was typical of the depth of our hopelessness: the totalitarian system can perhaps be slightly reformed as time goes by, but it is everlasting, indestructible. There was a clear way of being moral in the situation of oppression: he who opposed the system in one way or another was on the right side. And the audience immediately understood whom they should identify with.

In spite of the conditions mentioned above, many plays of a high artistic standard were created in postwar Czech drama, and despite a changing world, they still have a message for today's audience abroad. The continued interest in plays by Václav Havel, Josef Topol, Oldřich Danek, proves the point, as do adaptations of novels by Bohumil Hrabal and others. In my country, most literary managers in the theatres do not return to the works written before November 1989. The exception is the frequent production of literature by Bohumil Hrabal; they also belong to the most frequently presented works in theatres abroad (see below).

The following list of "the most significant" plays written after 1989 is of course subjective and, suprisingly, it is not long:

Karel Steigerwald:

Hoře, hoře, strach, oprátka a jáma (*Grief, Grief, Fear, the Rope and the Pit*)

(DNZ, 1991),

Nobel (ND, 1994)

Antonín Máša:

Podivní ptáci (*Strange Birds*) (ND, 1996)

Oldřich Danek:

Jak snadné je vládnout (*How Easy It Is to Rule*) (DNV, 1993)

Daniel Fischerová:

Fantomima (*Kašpar*, 1995)

Antonín Procházka:

Fatální bratři (*Fatal Brothers*) (DJKT, 1993),

S tvou dcerou ne! (*Not With Your Daughter!*) (DJKT, 1995)

Jan Kraus:

Nahniličko (*Soft-Boiled*) (DNZ, 1995)

Young authors

J.A. Pitínský:

Park (DNP, 1992),

Pokojiček (*Little Room*) (DNZ, 1994)

E. Tobiáš:

Vojcev (RD, 1992),

Cizinec (Foreigner) (A-studio Rubín, 1995)

L. Lagronová:

Antilopa (Antelope) (A-studio Rubín, 1995)

T. Rychetský:

Nevinní jsou nevinní (The Innocents Are Innocent) (A-studio Rubín, 1995)

D. Drábek:

Jana z Parku (Jane of Park) (MD Prostějov, 1996)

With older authors we can see a tendency towards a solid form, with a story and a dialogue depicting the characters. Even the best two plays, Steigerwald's *Nobel* and Máša's *Strange Birds* (both produced by the Prague National Theatre in 1994 and 1996 respectively), suffer from the absence of the common frame of reference between the author and the audience that I mentioned earlier. It must be admitted however, that they are the most significant attempts at a modern drama. They clearly take place in the present and strive to depict a state where "everything is broken and nothing is built", a state where the past has not been assessed, and where the characters are confused by an entropy of their ethics. The two authors critically observe the present state, but don't pretend that there's a catharsis.

Personally, I like two authors who know how to write comedy. Antonín Procházka is an actor at the theatre in the city of Plzeň; he personally directed his plays on his home stage. His comedies deal with the present, have witty dialogues, classic situational plots and have a solid dramatic structure. Jan Kraus is also an actor by origin. His play *Soft-Boiled* is a farce about a clash between the old thickheaded world of common people, and the young men and women in big business. One single intrigue yielded several comic situations. The marvellous interpretation by the company of the Theatre on the Balustrade (*Na zábradlí*) also contributed to the play's success.

K. Žantovská characterized plays of the authors of the youngest generation in a cogent way (SaD, 2/69, p. 71):

"... the dramas mostly refute the classical Aristotelian scheme. The characters are the bearers of a *priori* attitudes. The conflicts are expressed mostly in language. Even the death of some of the heroes is more a symbol than a tragic twist in the action. The end of the play is not a climax or *dénouement*, but a fading out or an interruption of the story. There is no causality in the human behaviour. At a given moment the characters pull out the feelings, experiences and reactions that are all stored inside them, like in a databank. This lends a mechanical nature to human behaviour; as if there's no chance of astonishment at something new.... The 'dramas' happen when an unexpected idea suddenly crops up, or when the mood of the actor suddenly changes. The eruptiveness and bizarreness of the ideas simply disguise the lack of actual experience or drama."

This applies to the works of the young authors Tomáš Rychetský, Egon Tobiáš and Markéta Bláhová and Lenka Lagronová. But thanks to the talent of each of these authors, their plays contain more. Behind the aimless struggling through the days and nights of two young men in *The Innocents Are Innocent* by Tomáš Rychetský lies a deep personal experience. It turns the play into a valuable

testimony of feelings about life among the young generation. Egon Tobiaš' play *Jaurés* is inspired by the atmosphere and language in the books of the Russian author Ivan Bunin. It presents a situation in which we wait for a story, for an event; a non-story before the story. In the end, the story will not happen.

In her play *Pastiěcka (A Little Trap)*, Markéta Bláhová depicts with shocking openness the world of girls' eroticism and sexuality, without any secrets and taboos.

2/ What is your personal assessment concerning the chances of the drama production in your country being understood and performed abroad? Are the issues local issues, intended just for local purposes, or would the content of the texts be accessible to a wider audience?

I have been racking my brains over this question for a long time. Finally it has occurred to me that it is not formulated properly. A really good play always contains a theme that draws the attention of the audience, no matter if it's done in a different country or at a different time. The history of the theatre is full of such examples. If the author, at the time of writing, has the intention of making it understandable in, say, America, he or she can write an interesting construction but not a good play. I dare say that I can more or less predict whether a certain Russian, Finnish, Slovenian or even Brazilian play would be interesting to a Czech audience - but vice versa?

Which Czech play would be enjoyed in France and which one in Holland? The context in which it happens to find itself in the particular country is essential, as is the question whether the language and style of the original have been translated adequately, as is the question which ensemble undertakes its foreign first night performance, etc.

I'll illustrate this with some examples. Václav Havel is one of the most frequently played living world authors of the day. He wrote his play *The Audience* in 1975 to entertain his friends, as is the case with two other one-act plays, *Vernisá (The Vernissage)* and *Protest (The Protest)*. These expanded anecdotes are deeply personal and connected with the Czech situation - and despite this, they rank among the most frequently played works in many foreign theatres.

At the opposite end, another renown Czech playwright, Pavel Kohout, achieved success on the world's stages primarily with his adaptations of world classics (Verne, Andrejev, Rolland, etc.). He has lived in Vienna since 1978 to make his lines of contact with the German-speaking theatres easier. Bohumil Hrabal has been another fixed star on the Czech and foreign stages for more than ten years, although he never wrote a play. His novels and stories, which are so closely tied up with the Czech situation and history, are nevertheless understandable to audiences both in the West and in the East. This can be judged by their response abroad.

In case of the young authors, their links to the domestic situation are much looser and in my opinion several plays could attract a young audience in particular. (Pitinský, Rychetský, Tobiaš, Bláhová). To answer your question: I think that most of the plays of the authors I have mentioned are, or could be, understandable to a foreign (European) audience.

3/ Is the public interested in work by contemporary authors? Does it attract an audience? What is the share these authors represent, if you look at the number of productions, originally written in your language at any time in history, per season in your country? And what is the share of contemporary

playwrights compared with the total text-based theatre production in your country, including authors from your own country and abroad?

The public can only be involved in the work of the playwrights through mediation - by attending a performance. A huge machinery stands between the author and the audience, and the author can be fortunate - or not. A single bad or misunderstood staging can "kill" even a good play for many years to come. If a Czech original fails in a leading theatre, like the National Theatre and the Vinohrady Theatre in Prague, then one can be sure that no other theatre will produce it. This was recently the case with K. Steigerwald's play *Nobel* and with A. Máša's *Strange Birds*.

Right now the literary managers of our theatres are extremely cautious. They are willing to present a new play - but once a play fails, the directors and ensembles are not very supportive of the author, and tend to blame him.

Plays were traditionally published in the form of books in the Czech lands and, in my recollection, people bought them. These days, plays are not published as books at all, or only in very rare cases. Unfortunately, the agencies DILIA or AURA-PONT don't even publish plays in a cheap, working edition (which used to be common practice with the DILIA agency when it held a monopoly in the 1948-1989 period). Plays are published only in specialized journals (SaD, *Divadelní Revue*) which are read only by theatre folk and thus a vicious circle is set up. However, the practice of the National Theatre in Prague, who make the Czech translation of a play-text or opera-libretto part of the programme booklet, is to be praised.

Audience figures show that Czech plays can count on as much interest as foreign plays, with attendances in big theatres ranging from 70 to 90 percent.

When I look at the faces of the people in the auditorium, they seem attentive, open-minded and keen to watch a play about themselves and the present time.

Czech dramatic literature is so extensive that it is impossible to demonstrate the part contemporary drama plays in the national drama as a whole. This would call for at least a dissertation, and an interesting one it would be. However, we can form an idea from the following information from old records.

Summary

Season	1955/56	1965/66	1973/74	1985/86	1995/96
Domestic plays %	41.5	31.5	31.0	35.5	29.0
Foreign plays %	58.5	68.5	69.0	64.5	71.0

This table surprisingly shows the oscillations connected with the changes in the social and political situation in our country. The unambiguous conclusion must be that the literary management of the Czech theatres has been "open" to the world. I don't have comparable data from other "small language" countries at my disposal, and therefore I can't judge whether this openness is excessive, and possibly harmful to the presentation of domestic authors.

4/ How many, if any, plays by contemporary playwrights in your country are produced in other countries with a different language? Do you know how these plays were brought to the attention of these foreign producers? Through literary agents, or because the plays were published, or via personal contacts? Or in a different way? In some countries more than one language is used. If this applies to your situation, how does the theatre deal with it?

To your question "how many plays by contemporary playwrights, if any, are produced in other countries in different languages?", I can proudly answer: many. But then we have Václav Havel. The case of Havel is so exceptional that perhaps he shouldn't be included in the list of Czech authors performed abroad. According to the list which I have been compiling, during the 1989-1996 period (1989 being the year in which he was repeatedly imprisoned in January and in which he led the "velvet" revolution and was elected the president of Czechoslovakia in December), a new boom in productions of his plays occurred. (According to my figures and not taking account of countries for which I have no information and where there were "pirate" performances during the revolutionary euphoria).

All together, in those seven years, the plays of Václav Havel were produced abroad at least 187 times (since 1963 there were about 400 productions). This is in sharp contrast to the relatively low number of productions on the recently liberated domestic stages: 24 productions - a quarter of which were amateur productions or readings only.

However, this is a topic for an entirely different study. From our point of view it typifies the mechanism by which Havel's plays made their way to the entire world.

And now about "the other" authors.

The question "how many" has to be answered again through a table showing the number of Czech titles played on foreign stages after November 1989. The first column shows the total number of plays; the following ones are the breakdowns in the diverse genres:

Year	Number of plays	Fairy tales Etc.	Classics	Original work	Hrabal
1990	8	1	1	4	2
1991	1	-	-	1	-
1992	8	4	-	2	2
1993	15	11	-	2	2
1994	14	9	-	2	3
1995	21	13	1	4	3
1996	25	12	3	6	4
TOTAL:	92	50	5	21	16

The most frequently played Czech author abroad after Václav Havel is Bohumil Hrabal (18x), followed by Karel Steigerwald (2x), Josef Topol (2x), Miroslav Horníček (2x), Daniela Fischerová (2x), and then 15 authors with one play each.

Unfortunately, I have no information about the productions of the plays by Pavel Kohout, since he is represented by the publishing house Sesselverlag in Vienna.

I obtained the figures shown above from two Czech agencies:

AURA-PONT, Radlická 99, 150 00 Prague 5

Fax: 42 2 53 99 09

Tel: 42 2 53 63 51

DILIA, Krátkého 1, 190 03 Prague 9

Fax: 42 2 82 40 09

Tel: 42 2 82 68 41-8

The two agencies work via the same methods. They send their catalogues either directly to foreign theatres or to the foreign partner agencies. The texts are offered in Czech (unless a professional translation to a world language from before the 1989 revolution exists, or a translation supplied by the author, usually made by somebody "out of love or friendship"). An English annotation is sent with the text.

But if we inspect the plays individually, we find that most of the plays arrived abroad thanks to a personal contact. For instance, a Polish student of the Czech language translates texts by Topol and Landovský, and then offers them to theatres. Daniela Fischerová had a personal invitation to The Juilliard School in New York and her play *Hodina mezi psem a vlkem* (*The Hour Between Dog and Wolf*) was translated there. A Finnish student of the Czech language translated Arnošt Goldflam's *Biletáka* (*The Usherette*) and then offered it to theatres in her homeland. The production of a translation currently depends on chance and on the author's personal contacts, since none of the agencies has sufficient funds to commission translations of the plays.

Publishing the plays in the journal SaD and in the National Theatre programme booklets can also help, but after that things depend on the personal activity of people who have studied Czech in the countries concerned, and on their contacts with local theatres. And not everybody who has learned Czech, and who works, for example, in a university, is able to convince a theatre to produce a play.

In some rare cases a director is invited to make a guest production and he is offered the possibility of producing a Czech title. Alternatively, a foreign theatre critic may visit a performance that catches his attention. He then might ask for the text and try to convince his friends at home to produce it. But the translation is always the principal problem.

5/ Are there any professional organizations in your country that promote the work of your playwrights in other countries? How do they operate, and how do they overcome the language problem? What is their rate of success? To which governmental or other funds do they have access?

As far as I know, there are no institutions to promote our plays abroad. These days, the two theatre and literature agencies are not supported by the State and they must earn their way. It is in their own interest to "sell" a play abroad and thus assist the author.

A significant achievement in supporting the creation of new plays was the establishment of the Alfréd

Radok Foundation in 1992. Every year they have a competition for the best play written in Czech or Slovak. (They include the Slovak language because they established the foundation in the former Czechoslovakia and the competition wants to maintain the Czech-Slovak character.)

The funding of the Foundation and the main prizes for the best authors come from sponsors, but for the sake of justice I must point out that one or two prizes are generally funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. As far as I know, this is the only State support for Czech drama.

Appendix -Survey of premieres of the original Czech Plays in the seasons 1989/1990 - 1995/1996

This survey does not and cannot cover in full scope all the premieres of texts presented by various small agency theatres, occasional groups of actors, etc. Furthermore, it does not include plays which were written and performed in puppet theatres. Their authors are mostly the directors, literary managers or actors of these theatres. It is characteristic of these theatres to adapt a famous fairy tale for its own purposes, and the text is rarely transferred to a different theatre. In this field the Czech practice of production is really very rich.

From the yearbooks of the Czech theatre compiled by the Theatre Institute in Prague I've taken the plays which were described by the particular theatre itself as the FIRST PRESENTATION. In the case of a dramatization, if the author of the adaptation is not mentioned, then it is mostly replaced the director or literary manager of the performance.

However, the number of really new drama texts is much lower than it would seem at the first sight.

The capitals in the list represent:

D -dramatization of a Czech or foreign novel

P -fairy tale, play for children

N -text which is non-transferable to another theatre

A -occasional text (e.g. Christmas play)

* - the number in brackets corresponds to the volume of plays of the authors whose plays couldn't be produced from political reasons before November 1989. This plays were written in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Havel, Uhde, Kohout, Landovsky, Sidon).

YEAR	VOLUME	D	P	N	P	ORIG.PLAYS	
98/90	33	8	3	2	1	21	*(11)
90/91	32	8	3	5	1	14	(6)
91/92	24	4	6	1	1	12	(3)
92/93	26	2	5	1	2	16	(4)
93/94	20	1	8	3	-	8	(0)
94/95	24	2	2	3	-	17	(0)
95/96	13	2	5	1	-	5	(0)

H.A.

Denmark

Contemporary Danish playwriting

Liz Vibeke Kristensen

1. Important contemporary Danish playwrights and plays

As everyone will understand, any statement under this headline is bound to be subjective. Moreover, the limited space allowed will be partly responsible for the following selection being less than all-encompassing.

The "father" of Danish playwriting - and the founder of the first theatre to perform in the vernacular - is Ludvig Holberg, the 18th century comedy writer whose works are still largely performed today. Much like Molière some decades earlier, Holberg was a great satirist of contemporary trends. At the same time, he always showed a deep understanding of and compassion towards human weaknesses. Although very few new Danish comedies see the light of day right now, this does not mean that Holberg doesn't have heirs in contemporary Danish playwriting.

A playwright of great humour, albeit of the understated kind, is the 40-year-old Erling Jepsen. Since his debut, almost twenty years ago, he has produced a large number of plays for the stage, TV and radio.

Jepsen is different from most Danish playwrights inasmuch as he is at his best when describing life far from the big cities. The life and "adventures" of people in small country towns, the mores of narrow social contexts, the claustrophobia of societies where the only hope for survival is getting out, are his main subjects. (A funny and moving play of his about two men dreaming up an escape from their dreary lives is called *The Beer Will be Better Next Year*.)

Erling Jepsen is an accomplished describer of the more morbid sides of parent-child relationships who is at his most moving and frightening where the relation between middle-aged or elderly parents and their grown-up children is concerned - who never seem to have come out right, according to the parents! Jepsen is basically a realist, but has at times ventured into more experimental styles (e.g. *Lovers in a Pedestrian Crossing*.)

His female counterpart, Line Knutzon, is a born and bred city girl, writing her often extremely funny plays on young people struggling to make their way through the metropolitan jungle in an original semi-absurdist, never-seen-before fairytale style. The subcultures of the unemployed young, the drama of a frustrated daughter-mother relationship, are treated with equal intensity and a riotous sense of the grotesque.

Both Line Knutzon and Erling Jepsen are exclusively playwrights. They write "actors' plays", with wonderful roles and texts that are bound to trigger the players' imagination.

Another woman playwright, Astrid Saalbach, originally trained as an actress. Apart from her plays for the stage and radio, she has also published works of prose.

Astrid Saalbach's theatrical training is very apparent in her work for the stage, which includes one of the best first plays of its decade (*The Hidden City*, 1986), dealing with a young girl's dilemma when her humanistic values are challenged as she assumes her first job as an assistant in a nursing home.

Saalbach is concerned with the growing malaise of the modern world, where all values are being questioned and people are groping in the dark, looking for meaning and clarity.

Over the years, Saalbach's style has developed from an almost entirely realistic approach into a fragmented style reminiscent of certain new German playwrights (W.M. Bauer, Botho Strauss, to name a few).

The young generation of playwrights dealing with their own generation's lives and problems includes, among others, Morti Vitzki (*Snow*, about a group of young drug addicts), and Elo Sjøgren (*Showtime*, the "death-dance" of a young couple). Peter Asmussen, a Danish representative of the more 'well-made international trendy play', made a break-through with his first play *Young Blood* (1993) about the relationship between a young man and an older woman.

One of Denmark's foremost novelists, Kirsten Thorup, is also a successful playwright. Her work includes TV plays and adaptations plus a few works for the stage.

Her modern version of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, entitled *Romantica*, is a gripping story of a young unemployed man confronted with the humiliations of a society that considers him superfluous. He is defeated when he finds himself unable to fulfil his role as a husband, breadwinner and passionate lover.

Recently, Kirsten Thorup wrote an acclaimed trilogy which was performed in a Copenhagen theatre by a mixed cast of Danish actors and immigrant amateurs, dealing with "the new Danes" - the large number of immigrants and refugees now living in Denmark.

Children's Theatre

Danish children's theatre has a strong reputation abroad, and of the abundance of new plays being staged by the Danish children's theatres several have been produced abroad. I will name just a couple:

Mohammed, a classroom play written and performed by a group of actors at a provincial children's theatre. It deals with the confrontation of an Iranian refugee and his wife and their son's schoolmates, and was translated into five languages.

Kim Nørrevig, a longtime actor, director and playwright who dedicates most of his time to children's theatre, wrote *The Monkey*, an absurd play about the fear of what's different. This play has been translated and performed in Germany, Sweden and Norway.

2. Are Danish plays marketable abroad?

Quite a few contemporary Danish plays are actually being marketed abroad, and in my opinion more than a few others would be potentially very marketable in other industrialized countries. A large number of plays are about subjects which are common to the kind of society found in most European countries today, even in those just starting to build democratic structures.

The conditions of modern life, the generation conflict, and the alienation of human beings faced with a changing society they cannot completely grasp, are subjects that concern today's Europeans to some degree - whether they live in a Western metropolis or in a developing provincial environment. Traditional family and social structures are falling apart everywhere, and gender roles are subject to profound changes.

Moral issues prevail when human beings are being confronted with the needs of the lesser privileged.

Immigration in all its aspects is a growing concern in every affluent Western society today. Cultural conflicts, the problems of second-generation immigrants, the issue of racism and xenophobia cannot be overlooked.

Many Danish radio plays are already being performed in many countries abroad. (Notably *Little Kirsten* by playwright Kaj Nissen, the winner of Prix Futura 1989, translated into 10 languages, and Anders Bodelsen's *The Gift*, which won the Prix d'Italia 1993 and was subsequently produced in seven European countries). The great majority of these radio plays are written by playwrights who are also active in the theatre. During the last few years, many new stage plays have been translated and performed abroad, especially in the other Scandinavian countries, in Germany, and Great Britain.

3. Professional organizations promoting Danish plays

The Danish Literature Information Centre (DLIC) is a governmental Danish institution promoting Danish literature abroad, including playwriting for grown-ups and also for children.

The drama activities of the centre include:

1. information on Danish playwriting
2. financial support for translations of Danish drama into foreign languages
3. travelling grants for translators of Danish plays
4. cooperation with drama agencies and public institutions concerned with drama

Re: 1: In 1995, they produced a promotional package of 25 fact sheets in English on as many plays by as many playwrights to help inform foreigners interested in Danish drama.

The feedback on this initiative from potential target groups has not been overtly positive. The new management of the DLIC has therefore decided to end this activity, replacing it with a quarterly newsletter offering ample information on new plays, including text samples in English.

Re: 2: DLIC is supporting the translation of Danish plays within two different programmes:

- a. translators' grants to produce either raw translations of plays or translations of parts of larger plays and/or promotional work based on these or summaries of plays, translations of reviews and suchlike.

These grants are not intended for translations already under contract with a theatre or an agent abroad. 250.000 Dkr. (appr. 40.000 USD) a year is allocated for this type of grant.

- b. grants to fully finance a translation of a Danish play under the condition that the play is definitely going to be produced. An opening night date set, or the appearance of the play on the seasonal plan of a theatre is the kind of guarantee called for. 400.000 Dkr. (appr. 65.000 USD) a year is allocated for this type of grant.

The grants mentioned above are national, governmental grants and are decided on by a special expert Advisory Board to the DLIC.

Re. 3-4: DLIC organizes translators seminars dealing with the problems of translating Danish plays into foreign languages.

A successful seminar was held in October 1996, bringing together a large group of translators and playwrights in Copenhagen. One of the results of this seminar was the creation of a network of members in several European countries, as well as in the USA and Canada.

DLIC collaborates with Danish cultural institutions and private agencies abroad in order to promote Danish plays.

Current examples include: The Danish Cultural Institute in Edinburgh. A Danish director based in London who together with a collaborator is planning a series of readings in the British capital during 1997. A centre in Montpellier, France, promoting foreign plays. In Italy, three festivals of Danish plays are being planned during 1997.

Moreover, for three years now the work of the DLIC concerning the promotion of Danish plays abroad has been developed and planned within the framework of a special Advisory Board, whose members represent the Danish Playwrights Union, the Danish centre of the ITI, and the foremost private agency. The Danish Playwrights' Union handle the rights of a large number of Danish playwrights, but only in relation to national theatres, film, TV, and radio.

The foremost agency in Denmark, Nordiska Strakosch, promotes foreign plays in Denmark and the other Nordic countries and also Danish plays abroad. This agency has successfully promoted some of the most talented younger playwrights. The agency publishes a quarterly newsletter, and finances the translation of one play a year, usually into English.

Every new translation is sent to 18 theatres abroad, including theatres in Great Britain, Germany (where close contacts with theatrical agencies are maintained), Poland, the Baltic countries, and the other Nordic countries. The agency keeps an office in Finland as well as the main office in Copenhagen.

The agency moreover collaborates closely with theatrical agencies in other European countries and with DLIC when it comes to promoting Danish plays.

4. Number of Danish plays and audience interest in Denmark

According to the Danish Statistical Department, 45% (73) of the 163 plays staged in Denmark during the 94/95 season were of Danish origin. Of these 73 plays 63 were "new" plays, i.e. written during the nineties, which means that 39% of the plays staged during this season were new Danish plays. Add to this a percentage of 81% of the 118 children's plays being performed during the same season. Eighty-five percent of these Danish plays were "new" plays, i.e. written during the nineties. These figures have been more or less stable during the nineties, give or take a few percent.

When it comes to audience attendance, the numbers (1994/95) are a little different:

Danish plays for adult audiences attracted 29% of the total audience for plays (compare this with a similar 29% attending English and American plays). Twenty percent of the audience attended new Danish plays.

For children's plays, the statistics show that 82% of the audience for children's theatre attended new Danish plays.

To correctly interpret these statistics, one has to be aware of the fact that, in Denmark as in other countries, a wave of "musicalization" has hit the theatre world during the past few years, highly influencing the audience attendance of so-called "straight plays", Danish or foreign.

Musicals are, more often than not, being staged in state-supported theatres and are attracting large audiences at high ticket prices.

It is worth mentioning that a few new Danish musicals have seen the light of day during the last few years and have attracted audiences as important as the more traditional musicals.

A tendency among the larger theatres to stage new Danish plays in smaller venues (i.e. secondary

stages in the larger regional theatres), and the willingness of "free group theatres" (companies with no permanent stage of their own) to try out new (Danish) material in small local theatres, also affect possible audience attendance.

A trend towards a more event-orientated, entertainment-prone kind of theatre as a result of the "festivalization" of cultural life as a whole, can be detected here. I personally find it quite amazing though, that under the circumstances, Danish plays are able to attract an audience as large as the Anglo-Saxon plays.

There are certain signs lately that the "musicalization trend" might have culminated, as the statistics for 94/95 show a relative decrease of 9% in the number of performances of musicals and an increase of 1% in the number of straight plays being performed, compared to the previous season. ■

Estonia

Estonian playwriting today*Andes Laasik*

First it is necessary to outline the theatrical situation that forms the basis of playwriting in Estonia. There are ten professional theatres in Estonia that present fewer than a hundred new productions per year. This is quite a large number taking into consideration that there are only one million native speakers of Estonian. At best, each Estonian theatre produces two new Estonian plays per year. The scope for Estonian theatre is so small that it is difficult to make one's living by writing for theatre only. All authors whose plays are presently staged have other jobs that earn them the money to live. Madis Kõiv, for example, is a retired physicist, Jaan Kruusvall is a novelist and journalist, Andrus Kivirähk a columnist, Merle Karusoo a director and sociologist. The situation is similar in bigger countries too, but in Estonia restrictions are especially hard.

This state of affairs is relatively new. During the long Soviet period, we had a few Estonian playwrights whose plays were played in the whole former communist block from East-Berlin to Vladivostok on the Pacific coast. Those playwrights represented the so-called official culture. Best known of them are August Jakobson and Egon Rannet. Their works were characterized by ideas of political collaboration and pseudo-social criticism.

I want to look at work written at the end of sixties and beginning of seventies as a totally independent phenomenon. A young generation of playwrights was influenced by the hope that we would be liberated from the communist system. They were also influenced by the Western youth movement and by the modern art born from this youth movement. Works created in this period, like *Cinderella Game* (1969) by Paul Eerik Rummo (born 1942), *Summer School* (1972) by Vaino Vahing (born 1940), *Phaeton, Son of the Sun* (1967) and *Good-Bye, Baby* (1975) by Mati Unt (born 1944), have not lost their importance as theatrical texts.

At the end of the eighties Estonian theatres found out that they had no Estonian plays to stage, except a few classical ones. Most plays written during the Soviet occupation turned out to be no more than a waste of paper. Theatres tried to participate in the discussion about the important historical and social issues of the revolutionary days of the liberation. A lot of new plays were written about deportations, armed resistance and Stalinist concentration camps. But those plays repeated the mistakes of the earlier so-called official drama by being schematic and too socialized. In 1991, when Estonia gave the theatres back their independence, they discovered that they had nothing to play. In the whole country only a couple of new Estonian plays were produced annually. In the old times, the percentage of original plays in Estonian was about a third. Society had changed and the function of the theatre as an institution changed as well. Those theatres that were not aware of the new situation lost their social importance. They lost a lot of audience too. Theatres were looking at plays that had success on Broadway or London's West End. A lot of attention was paid to modern drama written after World War II. For many different reasons, this kind of drama had not been staged here before. New Estonian plays returned to the theatres only a couple of years ago.

Today we can call Madis Kõiv (born 1926) a contemporary classic, though his career as a playwright has been strange. He wrote his first play, *Castrozza*, more than 20 years ago, but it wasn't staged until 1991. He has written more than 16 plays, and eight of them have been produced. Madis Kõiv was not a forbidden author in the period of Soviet occupation. Theatres were just not able to produce his texts then. Now a few plays of Madis Kõiv have been staged also in Finland, the place nearest to Estonia both culturally and geographically. *Returning to the Father* (produced in 1993) and *The Philosopher's Day* (1994) were the most important theatrical events and provided an opportunity to create a new theatrical language and offer interesting material for actors.

Madis Kõiv was quite a well-known physicist in the field of elementary particles. He is also a philosopher who is at home in European history. Some of his plays are historical fictions that deal with rich historical material. For example, his *Meeting* (staged 1991) tells us about the meeting of Leibniz and Spinoza. Events of the play take place in Utrecht during the chaos of the Dutch Revolution. *The Philosopher's Day* depicts one day in the life of Immanuel Kant - in Königsberg in July 1793, three years after the French Revolution. *Meeting* and *The Philosopher's Day* are full of witty discussions. The treatment of history, time and space in the plays of Madis Kõiv provides the theatre with enormous opportunities.

Jaan Kruusvall (born 1940) became a well-known playwright after his *Colours of Clouds* was produced in 1983. The play describes life on a farm on the North Coast of Estonia in 1944. In the play, Kruusvall talks about simple events: the son is going to fight against the Red Army, the work on the land is hard, the daughters escape to Finland because of the Soviet danger. At the same time these simple events reflect national history. In 1987 *The Parish Hall of Silence* was done here, a play about armed resistance and the deportation of 1949. Kruusvall's last play is *Mad Professor* (1996). It is a two-character play about an elderly couple, a man and a woman, who have both escaped from the urban environment. The play provides a background to their profound love story and opens up interesting possibilities to understand them.

Merle Karusoo (born 1944) wrote her first theatrical text *I am 13 Years Old* in 1980 based on classroom essays. After that she wrote *Our Biographies* (1982) and *When Rooms Are Filled* (1982). The theatrical work of Merle Karusoo can be compared to sociological work with documentary material. All her texts feature concrete prototypes and are based on a real story. Merle Karusoo worked in the Pirgu Development Centre collecting various documentary materials like diaries, memoirs and biographies. Based on them, she wrote *Report* (1987), *Diary of August Oja* (1989) and *Letters of Theodor Maripuu* (1990). Merle Karusoo keeps on modifying her text during the rehearsal period and the play is finished only after the first night. Her writing can be considered as group work, with the strong actor participation.

Toomas Kall (born 1947) is connected with Vanalinnastudio Theatre, which mostly puts on comedies. His best work, *Simple and Beautiful*, is a witty and absurd allegory. Toomas Kall has also written intelligent reviews, *Dustbin I-III*, parodies of politicians and other public figures.

Andrus Kivirähk (born 1969) is an outstanding playwright who represents the young generation. He started with children's plays. His *Old Fellows from the Seventh* (1992) was eminent because of the highly personal humour. *Walking on the Rainbow* (1994) was a rare example of a new Estonian play that reflects contemporary life and mixes all sorts of characters and themes from well-known literature, films and TV.

Within the last few years some non-traditional plays have been staged in Estonian theatre. We can see them as an alternative to the mainstream. The young director Jaanus Rohumaa of the Tallinn Town Theatre started work on folk stories. Hisrk. Using this experience, he created a play *The Only and Eternal Life* (1996) on the subject of theatre history. It has been very successful.

The non-subsidized Von Krahl Theatre produced several new Estonian plays. The most outstanding of these are *Krupp's Last Tape* (1994) written by Toomas Saarepera and Ervin Üunapuu, and *Immelman's Knot* (1995) written by Toomas Hussar and Ervin Üunapuu.

The number of new Estonian plays is still quite small and all the plays are very different. It is therefore impossible to point out common trends or mutual influences. The few modern playwrights there are represent different generations too. We have no special training for playwrights or dramaturges, since there is no school for them here. But it seems big changes are ahead. In the past four years, television has developed considerably in Estonia. Some playwrights, like Andrus Kivirähk or Toomas Kall, have written a lot for TV and have been successful in this field. Let's hope new writing for the theatre will soon develop as well.

The repertoire of Estonian theatres is based on translated plays. During the Soviet period the literary standard of translations in Estonia was high. Meticulous translations from original languages only were made, and they were edited several times. There were lots of writers, translators etc. outside the theatre who were leading a literary life abroad and able to give advice to theatres. Today most of the repertoire work has to be done at theatres. An important channel for finding new plays is the Estonian Drama Agency. The example of foreign theatres is important too. Typically, the management of a theatre thinks 'this play is successful there - let's also stage it'. Estonian theatre professionals try to follow what is going on in Scandinavian theatres. Also, Estonia does not know about new dramaturgy in the former Socialist camp. Usually theatres do not put on plays that have not been staged several times elsewhere or plays from marginal cultures. The main reason for this is that the audience is quite conservative. For example, they don't want to see a play without a clear-cut storyline. Consequently the German play *In the Eyes of the Stranger* by Wolfgang Maria Bauer was not received well by the audience, though it was done quite well.

That's why most plays in Estonian theatres are from England or America. Some drama theatres are playing musicals. Every season each theatre has to put on a few light comedies because the audience demands it. Even old and long forgotten German or Austrian farces will do. People like also French comedies. A well-done classical play is also a guarantee of audience success.

The Estonian Drama Agency (EDA) was established three years ago. EDA's field of activities is wide: copyright, promotion of new writing, information about plays. EDA represents Estonian plays abroad and foreign plays in Estonia. It has information about the repertoire of Estonian theatres. EDA receives a government subsidy for the promotion of new writing. EDA organizes competitions for playwrights. If you are interested in any information connected with drama in Estonia, please contact EDA - Estonian Drama Agency

Suur-Karja 23, Tallinn EE0100 Estonia

Tel.: 372-6282342, Fax: 372-6282344, E-mail: ena@teleport.ee

ESP -Estonian Stage Productions

Rataskaevu 10, Tallinn EE0001

Tel.: 372-6411501, Fax: 372-6313237, E-mail: gulliver@esp.teleport.ee

Finland

The land that is*Vesa Tapio Valo*

For some reason, Finns often quote the Finnish-Swedish poet Edith Södergran's characterization of their country: 'a land that is not'. Another popular quotation comes from Brecht, who claimed that Finland - which has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish - 'keeps silent in two languages'. Perhaps it is so, but this is not the whole truth, particularly today.

Geographically a little out-of-the-way, Finland has in the past years opened up its windows to the West. European integration is part of our everyday life, but Finland is known little, if at all - and ironically enough that is often part of the country's charm. The Monty Python song hit the nail on the head: "Finland, Finland, it's far away from Belgium".

Finnish cultural life originated as part of the national project. Finland was in fact invented in the 18th and 19th centuries by scholars, writers, artists, and composers (yes, you're right, Sibelius is not Swedish, but Finnish!). Weapons for making a nation were needed much later.

Finnish theatre and drama have not, unfortunately, been able to produce internationally famous stars, such as Strindberg (he is Swedish!) or Ibsen. In other words, we lack classics that, in the European context, would create a familiar set of co-ordinates. Finland has not really made an appearance on the theatre map.

Nevertheless, many of the present century's writers deserve a European audience. Maria Jotuni's *Tohvelisankarin rouva* (*The armchair hero's wife*, 1924), or the dramatization of her novel *Houjuva* (*The swaying house*, dramatized in 1983 by Maaria Koskiluoma, and performed in both Finland and the United States), portray men, women and marriage in a lucid way. *Houjuva* partly figures at a mythical level; *Tohvelisankarin rouva* is a bitter middle-class comedy. Since the beginning of the history of Finnish drama, women have written the lion's share of plays. This tradition continues today. Of the contemporary writers, perhaps the most international is Paavo Haavikko, who won the Nordic Drama prize in 1996 with his play *Anastasia ja minä* (*Anastasia and me*). Its premiere was - nota bene - in Bonn, Germany, not in Finland. Haavikko, who has written countless dramatic texts from the 1950's onwards, has been difficult to swallow for the Finnish theatre. Finnish drama is deeply rooted in folk theatre and the amateur stage. Haavikko has perhaps been considered too intellectual, his language too poetic and undramatic, his themes too international and not always amusing.

Nevertheless, Haavikko's high quality has found its way into other dramatic genres; his radio plays have been performed in numerous languages. Of his plays, the following have been used as librettos: *Ratsumies* (*The horseman*) performed, among other places in Germany; *Soitannollisen seuran iltamat Viipurissa 1918* (*A musical society evening in Viipuri 1918*) and *Kuningas Lähtee Ranskaan* (*The king goes forth to France*). The latter was a joint commission by the Savonlinna Opera Festival and London's Covent Garden. *Sulka* (*The feather*) is currently being composed as an opera. The large-scale television drama *Rauta-aika* (*Iron Age*) won the Prix Italia.

Jussi Kylätasku, born in 1943, wrote the play *Kyllikki ja Runar* (*Kyllikki and Runar*) which was first

performed in 1974. Its theme was the sexual murder of a young girl, and this modern classic is sometimes called a 'Finnish Woyzeck'. It has been performed in Sweden and the United States, and published in German. In another major work, *Haapoja, Kylätasku*, who is particularly interested in crime, describes an unusual love story between the murderer Haapoja and the devout philanthropist Matilda Wrede, who comes to see him as a 'prisoner's friend'. It all makes for a captivating and grotesque play, with the story of the encounter between the sacred and the profane being represented by a cheap Tivoli company.

Several generations of dramatists have in common that they have often studied at the dramaturgy section of the Theatre Academy in Helsinki. The course takes four years, some of it in collaboration with the courses for directors and actors. Teaching is not just theoretical, but right from the start it involves writing for the stage and trying out texts in practice. In the final stages, dramatists work in collaboration with professional theatres. Academy graduates are Jukka Vieno, Harri Virtanen (who are also practitioners of farce and comedy), Pirkko Saisio (a balancing act between a religio-mythical world and the politics of the day), Esko Salervo (the meanings of myths, memory and identity), Michael Baran (who has made use, among other things, of the child's perspective), Laura Ruolonen (ecological themes), Juha Siltanen (capturing modern man through linguistic virtuosity), Es Kirkkopelto (new political theatre) and many others.

Collaboration has also resulted in actors and directors writing, and playwrights directing. The former rector of the Theatre Academy, and perhaps Finland's most controversial director, Jouko Turkka (born 1942) has recently concentrated on writing and directing his own texts. His latest great success *Rakkaita pettymyksiä rakkaudessa* (*Dear deceptions in love*) has been translated into English and there are plans for a London production. One of Finland's leading male actors, Karl Heiskanen, is also a promising playwright.

Every year, Finnish professional theatres present premieres of between 40 and 50 new Finnish plays. That means each theatre premieres at least one new Finnish play. Statistics about the size of the audiences for these new plays are not clear. We know only the total figures for Finnish plays - which include both old and new Finnish plays. This percentage varies between 40 and 47. the proportion of new plays among all Finnish plays is estimated at between 20 and 25 percent.

Finnish plays are not easily exported beyond the country's borders, unless they are made into opera's or written in the country's second language, Swedish. Examples of these include Bengt Ahlfors and Johan Bargum's Aids play, *Onko Kongossa tiikereitä* (*Are their tigers in the Congo?*), which has been performed a great deal abroad, in contrast with the usual practice.

Scandinavia certainly forms the gate to the world for Finnish drama. A certain amount of Finnish literature is performed in Sweden and translated into Swedish. The problem for Finland is that there are very few translators in the world with a knowledge of the Finnish language, which is spoken by only five million people. Distribution and translation of plays is taken care of by the Finnish Association of Playwrights (address: Vironkatu 12 B, 00170 Helsinki, Finland: fax + 358 9 135 6171) and the Theatre Information Centre TINFO (address Mertullinkatu 33, 00170 Helsinki, Finland, fax: +358 9 135 5533; e-mail : finfo@nimad.fi, home page <http://www.nimad.fi/Teatteri>).

These organizations commission translations of between four and six Finnish plays every year, most of them into English, but also into German and French and sometimes other languages. These plays can be obtained free of charge from the above organizations. The Theatre magazine, published by

TINFO once a year (in English and in French), always includes a play translation. The magazine is free and subscriptions are welcome. It is possible for translators to apply to the Finnish Literature Information Centre for translation grants.

The renaissance of the Finnish theatre in recent decades owes a great deal to the activities of small dance theatres. These pioneers of nonverbal movement theatre now all reside under the same roof: ZODIAK PRESENTS (address Tallberginkatu 154, 00180 Helsinki, Finland, telephone + 358 9 694 4948, fax: 562 5802). For an impression of the state of Finnish theatre and playwriting however, coming to Finland is better still: the Tampere International Theatre Festival (address Tullikamarin aukio 2, 33100 Tampere, Finland, telephone + 358 3 222 8536, fax 223 0121), held every year in August, presents a representative selection of the best Finnish productions.

The fact that Finnish plays have been translated into foreign languages is a good thing, but putting them in the mail is not enough. In my experience, plays cross borders through personal contacts. The first important factor is that the dramatist should be able to meet his translator and discuss the text's problems. To this end there is a translation centre in Germany, at the Europäischer Übersetzer-Kollegium in Straelen. It also operates as a writer's hotel.

The best alternative of all is to have a text, a writer, a good translation and a production of the play, that can be seen directly by a foreign audience and possible new producers, with the author present. Such a festival of new drama, which concentrates on new texts and their productions, is held every year in Bonn: the Bonner Biennale. Results have been excellent. The artistic director Tankred Dorst, himself a great dramatist, has selected a Finnish play for each biennale. Writers have included Ilpo Tuomarila, Esa Kirkkopelto and Jouko Turkka.

In this way, the isolation of Finnish theatre is breaking down. As a theatre country, Finland is no longer "the land that is not".

(Translated by *Hildi Hawkins*)

Hungary

Hungarian theatre*Anna Lakos*

Before the change in the political regime, a period existed in which the unwritten rules of cultural policy demanded that Hungarian plays had to be shown in theatres. The same applied to plays from neighbouring Socialist countries. Like with many other things, this had both advantages and disadvantages. It allowed us to familiarise ourselves with the dramatic art of our neighbours, but the plays shown were not necessarily the best ones.

When Zsámbéki and Székely, the two leading personalities of the generation of directors who made their debut in the early seventies, were appointed managers of the Nemzeti (National) Theatre at the end of the decade, they were immediately exposed to many attacks. They were criticised, among other things, for failing to present any contemporary Hungarian plays in the national theatre. They, however, believed that only high-quality contemporary works merited their attention, and did not care about fulfilling the imposed norm. The situation changed when they discovered plays they found intriguing: György Spiró's two plays, *Chicken Head* (Csirkefej) and *Impostor* (Imposztor) met with great success under the direction of Gábor Zsámbéki at the József Katona Theatre.

Today the same question, i.e. whether contemporary plays are shown in the theatres, arises again, but this time it lacks the ideological element. One would have thought that the change of political regime would unlock drawers filled with treasure. This was not the case.

In certain respects, the theatre was more interesting and important before 1989 than it is today. What went on in the state-financed repertory theatres nationalised in 1949, was not just to satisfy the commissioner. Some of these theatres turned against the financing commissioner with the force of words uttered on the stage. Since the public debate was very restricted, the role of the theatre, overtly or covertly, was more important than normal. Changes, however, placed politics in their proper place: Parliament. And the theatre slowly sank into a crisis of identity.

Generally, contemporary Hungarian plays have recently been ousted from large theatres and are performed before smaller audiences. In line with general trends, entertainment genres like musicals are increasingly popular, including musical comedies by contemporary Hungarian authors.

This can primarily be attributed to financial reasons: the management of theatres can no longer risk giving a chance to unknown or hardly known authors. Such plays do not attract an audience, unless they feature stars.

Nevertheless, the set-up mentioned above has got several advantages too. The small stage, the intimate atmosphere of these theatres encourages, often even compels the director to adopt a more daring attitude. Consequently, the performances of contemporary plays present excellent occasions for finding new forms of expression within the theatre. Examples of this are: *Farewell Symphony* (Búcsúszinfónia) by Eszterházy in the Padlás Theatre of the Vígszínház, the plays of András Nagy in the Stúdió of the Thália Theatre, *Müller Dancers* (Müller táncosai) by Ákos Németh in the Kamra of the József Katona Theatre, Andor Szilágyi's play in the Radnóti Theatre, as well as the plays shown in

the 'studios' of the Debrecen, Kaposvár, Szolnok and Győr theatres, which have become the workshops of new Hungarian plays. Although the list is not complete, it is sufficient for making a point, namely that contemporary Hungarian plays find their way to the theatre.

On the occasion of the Debrecen Literary Days, the literary historian and critic, Tamás Tarján said at a meeting on contemporary Hungarian drama that "drama was confined to the periphery of literary life two or three decades ago". In his view, this is partly because the writing and critical interpretation of drama lags behind that of lyrics and epics. Indeed, it is undeniable that Hungary has excelled in lyrics, that we are a "nation of poetry and prose". Drama occupies last place. The theatre, however, owing to the circumstances of its development, has always been important. People still go to the theatre and although it might sound unbelievable, according to statistics from 1995 and 1996 out of a population of ten million, four or five million still visit the theatre.

How can this be explained? From the viewpoint of drama, drama is a literary genre. From that of the theatre, it is one of the constituting elements of a theatrical work. Which of these viewpoints is dominant always depends on the given period.

Tarján asserts that "after 1945 - until about 1965 - Hungarian dramas normally featured heroes of strong identity who placed history actively and interactively into the centre of plays". The golden age of Hungarian drama was without doubt the seventies, when several crucial works were written by Gyula Illyés, László Németh, Hubay, Gyurkovics, Szakonyi, Hernádi, Görgey, Páskándi, Ferenc Karinthy etc. Today these plays very rarely figure on the programme of the theatres, they now belong to literary history.

Absurd drama was not merely a literary genre that determined dramatic writing, it was also a way of looking at the world which "brought about radical changes not only in drama but also in our concept of the world." In the recent past, neither lyrics nor epics have undergone such a shock... Previously, the genre had fought with "dislocated time and characters who were born to push time back to its own place... since the birth of the absurd it became clear that there is nothing to dislocate it from" /Alföld 1997/2, Tarján/.

István Örkény (1912-1979) marked the turning point in Hungarian drama caused by the appearance of the absurd. He was the determining personality of the sixties and seventies. The absurd and the grotesque first appeared on the Hungarian stage in his plays. Some of these - *The Tót Family* (Töték), *Cats' Game* (Macskajáték), *Pisti in a Storm of Blood* (Pisti a vérzivatarban) were successful both as books and as plays. Örkény was a key figure for the next generation. Not only did he interest writers in playwriting, he also liberated them and opened new avenues with his world view and style. After 1956, Örkény and his contemporaries realised that "the age of the heroic protagonist is over and his place is taken by the grotesque protagonist, with whom it is much more difficult to identify" Zsuzsa Radnóti/.

The most influential personalities of the generation following Örkény are: György Spiró, novelist and dramatist; Mihály Kornis, who started as a theatre director and became a dramatist; Péter Nádas, whose most significant activity is prose writing but whose trilogy also opened a new page in Hungarian theatre; Géza Bereményi who concentrates on adapting his own scripts to the cinema; and György Schwajda who is known for his absurd plays and who as a theatre manager directs more and more on the stage.

The book called *Deficient Dramaturgy* (Hiánydramaturgia) published in 1982 on the young dramatists of the seventies concludes with three studies: *Deficient Dramaturgy*, *Nostalgia for Action*, and *The Hero's Long-Left Place*. These titles are indicative of the age. The authors of various styles and temperaments all have the same feature: their heroes slide from instinctive passivity to conscious idleness, i.e. 'from inactiveness to incapability of action'. This applies particularly to Mihály Kornis' *Allelujah* (Halleluja). The main character in *Nádas' Meeting* (Találkozás) is confronted with his past, but there is almost nothing he can hold on to. Nearly every main character in these plays struggles not only with the past, but also with their father's generation. There is no real room for action for the young generation in the vacuum they live in. What remains is a feeling of being fettered, of numbness and a craving for action.

This generation is kept together by a similar world view. They are constantly revolting against their father's generation and at the same time suffer from being at odds with themselves.

In her book on the drama of the eighties, *The Age of Minor Characters*, (Mellékszereplők kora) Zsuzsa Radnóti writes about László Márton and András Forgách among others. In this comprehensive work, the author points out that the generation succeeding the great generation of 1968, "looks upon almost everything for which our fathers and grandfathers died with cool reserve". The most outstanding members of this generation are László Márton, András Nagy, András Forgách and Pál Békés (born in the fifties). Radnóti finds that there is no real hero in their dramas, instead, all protagonists behave like minor characters and 'let things happen to them'.

László Márton, who started as a writer of prose, writes streams of drama. Although his plays are set in different ages and against different backgrounds, one common element unites his plays - *Palace of Torments* (Kinkastély), *Butterflies on a Hat* (Lepkék a kalapon) and *Ambitious* (Nagyratörő). It is the author's fascination for the thought of destruction. *The Palace of Torments* was inspired by György Spiró's novel *X'es* (Ikszek) and tells the story of the famous Polish actor, Boguslawski who is willing to sacrifice his art for the favour of political power. *Butterflies on a Hat* was also provoked by a work of literature, the novel *Fog* (Köd) by the 19th century prose writer, Elek Gozdsu. The characters of this grotesque comedy "watch each other's ruin with indifference". His play *Ambitious* seems to recall the poetic world of historical drama. The protagonist of this bloodthirsty Transylvanian play is a sick man, an opportunist who ruins himself and others through his narrow-mindedness, uncertain behaviour and indecision.

Tarján calls András Nagy a committed moralist. His plays are often inspired by works of literature or great figures of cultural history. His play *Anna Karenina Station* (Anna Karenina pályaudvar) is a continuation of Tolstoy's novel: what if Anna had not jumped under the train, but instead had left with her lover. That is what happens, but everything becomes insipid and unbearable. In her great love, Anna wants to monopolize Vronski, who is unable to accept that he had to give up his career. In another of his plays, entitled *The Seducer's Diary* (A csábító naplója), in which the central figure is Kierkegaard, Nagy attempts to understand the relationship between the philosopher and his lover. His work *Apple* (Alma) deals with a similar question: the life of Mahler's wife, her relationship with her husband and other men is told by the woman herself. In nearly all his works, András Nagy struggles with the question of self-identity, value, self-preservation and the irreconcilable contrast between thinking and the Eros.

András Forgách's *Player* (Játékos) is also an adaptation of Dostoyevski's work. His most complex

play, however, is *Vitellius*, which is a historical drama on the dethronement, death and self-seeking of the Roman emperor. By contrast, *Almonds* (*Mandulák*), is set in our days and is about three brothers whose parents have died. They fought with each other, with the world and with themselves.

Tarján says that Pál Békés is the man of ideas of his generation. The protagonist of his comedy *Before the Eyes of the Female Coastguard* (*A női partőrség szeme láttára*) is a recently divorced man who almost hopelessly tries to win a place for himself in impossible and absurd situations and to answer the questions of life and to define himself.

However different the styles, world views and world of these authors might be, their heroes are all people who have lost their footing and are searching for their own selves. The central issue is not the relationship with the father's generation anymore, but the main character's definition of his own situation, of his own relationship with the world. Another striking feature is the literary reference, literature as the starting point. Previous works, however, are rather rewritten and continued than adapted.

The best way to distinguish the youngest generation is not by date of birth. Although most of its members were born in the sixties, some were born much earlier, but became dramatists later. The topics of the youngest generation concentrate on private life. The plays are characterized by decay, chaos, incapability to communicate and fragmentation, and in most cases, by the lack of love. This, however, is not a phenomenon that came out of the blue. It had already begun in the eighties, but it is only now that it fell into line with the age.

Péter Kárpáti came forward with four plays within a short period: *Destination Singapore* (*Szingapur végállomás*), *The unknown Soldier* (*Az ismeretlen katona*), *The River at the End of the Road* (*Az út végén a folyó*) and *Anyone* (*Akárki*). His works explore situations in life from the viewpoint of the poor, the outcast and the neglected, and sometimes touches upon naturalism. His play *Anyone* is an imprint of the Hungarian reality of the beginning of the nineties, bearing at the same time the marks of the preceding years. The protagonist is a woman who is unable to face her own death. Kárpáti's works are nevertheless imbued with sympathy, a feature which distinguishes them from the style and tone of his colleagues.

Andor Szilágyi's *Unsent Letters* (*El nem küldött levelek*), the subtitle of which is *A Play with Life*, searches the secrets of life and its sense. The two protagonists act out different roles in different everyday situations and although they assume various characters, they remain fundamentally unchanged. In his other work, *The Terrible Mother* (*A rettenetes anya*) with again a meaningful subtitle *The Life of Birds* (a drastic symbol), the characters appear in various shapes. Its subject is the terrible and entangled relationship between the members of the man-bird's family, told in the grotesque and surrealistic style of tales.

Akos Németh stands out with his atmosphere-creating capacity and with light dialogues. His play *Muller's Dancers* shows the struggle and disintegration of a dance troupe that lost its master, as well as the dancers' individual hopelessness and incapacity. The dramatic structure itself, the fragmented scenes, reflect the mood of the dancers, their collective 'homelessness'. Its performance on stage met with great success, perhaps due because it's about the problems of a certain age-group.

The poet and prose writer Garaczi has published four plays. His works appear naturalistic, although

this is only an outcome of 'taking the minute naturalistic portrayal so much to the extreme that the atmosphere becomes dreamlike and unreal after a while' (Zsuzsa Radnóti). One of the locations in one of his other plays, is a pub where the inert members of a community are awaiting the appearance of Imoga as their redeemer. They hope that she will be able to change their fate, but Imoga turns out to be unworthy of their trust and her expected role. As Zsuzsa Radnóti remarks, Imoga fails to do the task because 'she is also a minor character', just like the others. While this work still shows some interest for the political and social situation and topic, his other plays deal with fragmentation, the impossibility of human relationships, and communicational misunderstandings. The decisive element in his plays, the playful handling of language, can be explained by his background.

László Darvasi is known primarily as a writer of prose who adapts his own historical short stories to the stage. His play *Investigation in the Case of the Roses* (*A vizgálat a rózsák ügyében*) tells the story of the unravelling of a murder. According to László Márton, Darvasi tells a story in which the essential thing is not its reality, but its mode of narration, i.e. the surrealism of the plays. The individual tone of his other two plays, *Mad Helga* (*Bolond Helga*) and *Ernö Szív* (*Szív Ernő*) is brought about through the combination of the "neoclassic" and surrealist/grotesque linguistic elements and styles.

Although Lajos Parti Nagy is older than the authors mentioned above, his activities define him as a member of the same generation. He started as a poet and a prose writer. His works published so far include *Ibusár* and *Mausoleum* (*Mauzóleum*). The latter presents the life of the tenants of a block of flats where people are kept at bay, humiliated and intimidated by the newly rich, 'entrepreneur' people. *Ibusár* is a special surrealist play about the life dream of a forty-year old maid: great love and her career as an operetta librettist. Parti's stories are unusual. They start from a realistic or naturalistic basic situation carried to the extreme. Still, the author's imagination, linguistic humour, poetic rendering and grotesque way of looking at things, result in a work that combines the worlds of reality and imagination in a poetic way.

The Dramatist's Road to the Public, to the Theatre

In Tamás Tarján's view, the reception of drama by the Hungarian public is impeded by the fact that "in Hungary dramatic works play a rather modest role in primary and secondary education and much less is taught about their reception, decoding and specifics, than about the tricks of trade of the other two genres. This is the source of the lack of dramaturgical culture and aversion towards drama".

One should also keep in mind that dramas are hardly published. Publishers are generally not interested, only a few of them keep on trying. The special issues of journals devoted to drama are not long-lived. Also, customers are not very keen on buying dramatic works of journals on drama. Under such circumstances, the relationship between the theatre and the dramatist is even more important. A drama can only have a fate if the director senses the opportunity in the written work. "Some dramatists' fate and career prove that one or more authentic, stylistically appropriate and well-composed theatrical performances are indispensable for success and acknowledgement... A good, professional critical reception is necessary as is a literary record, since in the Hungarian theatre, theatre critics themselves cannot give a literary rank to the playwright." (Zsuzsa Radnóti)

The Chamber of Dramatists has tried to change this situation. Ten years ago they launched the so-called Open Forum, where participants discuss the best Hungarian plays of the previous season, with contributions from invited speakers. In the last few years, the selection has been extended to include the works of foreign dramatists as well. These are also published by the Open Forum, which makes them available to a wider reading public.

Dramas need several intermediaries to find their way to the theatre on 'Home ground'. This is even more difficult abroad, especially with a body of dramatic literature born 'in a small language'.

The fact that the Hungarian language forms an island, brings us both advantages and disadvantages. The interest from other countries is often determined by a country's current situation and topicality. When changes started in Eastern Europe in 1989, the interest in the theatres and plays of this region increased considerably. This interest, however, subsided when the fashion passed. This natural reaction is not to be lamented: perhaps we only now start to show a real interest for each other, independent of fashions. Such an interest may mainly be satisfied by translating dramas to the 'big' languages and by compilations of synopses and information journals such as the French *Entr'Act*, edited by Sabine Bossan.

Iceland

Everyone goes to the theatre*Ólafur Haukur Símonarson*

Iceland is a large island in the middle of the North Atlantic, where in summer the average temperature is about 10 C, and in the winter around 0 C. It takes us two and a half hours to fly to London to go to the theatre there, three and a half hours to go to New York. The population of Iceland is about 260,000 people; each year the theatre attendance is around 260,000 people. Any mention of numbers in Iceland usually brings forth the same reaction in the minds of foreigners: You must be joking! Yet this is a modern, high-technology society, where the level of education, quality of housing, car and computer ownership are all among the highest in the world. And what about the theatre? Can world-class theatre flourish in such a micro state? People often forget that the London of Shakespeare's day had a population similar to that of Reykjavik today, and that the residents of Athens during the Golden Age of the Ancient Greek dramatists were certainly fewer in number than the present residents of the Icelandic capital. In Iceland 'everyone' goes to the theatre.

There are no class divisions in Icelandic theatre. At the turn of this century, there were no cities in Iceland, and hardly a town worthy of the name. The nation lived in turf farmhouses and simple, wood-frame houses huddled together in the fishing stations and trading centres. Now Icelandic society could rightly be described as having developed into a small city state (the metropolis of Reykjavik, with some 2/3 of the population living in a fairly confined area in the Southwest corner of the country).

The Icelandic nation has worked its way out of the poverty and humiliation of colonial times in the mere half a century since the establishment of the Republic in 1944. Everything had to be created from scratch: all the structures (including residential housing, schools, hospitals, power generating stations) all the means of production, roads, harbours, practically everything in the country is new.

Everything, that is, except one thing: its literature, which never died out, not even when the people themselves were almost wiped out during the 18th century. This thousand-year-old literary tradition proved to be the most effective, and was possibly the only, weapon the Icelanders had in their struggle for independence. It was because of our literature, and the remarkable fact that the Old Norse tongue had been preserved here with only little change, that the nation's demands to escape after centuries of subjugation, first to Norway and later Denmark, were eventually recognized.

The reestablishment of Icelandic nationhood in 1918, followed by the dissolving of the Union with Denmark and full republican status in 1944, injected new life and vigour into Icelandic literature. One of the first cultural undertakings was the establishment and opening of a new National Theatre. The first plays shown were modern Icelandic works. The nation realized that the only grounds for the independence of an unarmed micro state were cultural ones: this is the way we are, this is the way we want to be; we are a special thread in the tapestry of world culture.

Approximately one-third of Icelandic theatre productions are new Icelandic works. The professional theatres in Iceland present between 50 and 60 productions annually, one-third of which are premieres of new Icelandic works. Amateur theatre groups, some 80 in number and spread throughout the country, show between 80 to 100 plays each year, about one-third of which are Icelandic works. Icelandic plays usually draw larger audiences than either classical works for theatre or 'renowned' new foreign plays. In some cases between 30 and 40 thousand people have attended a new Icelandic play.

What are the characteristics of Icelandic playwriting?

As might be expected, the number of Icelandic playwrights is not large. The Union of Icelandic Playwrights has only 60 members. Although the members of this group share few characteristics in common, it is interesting to note that almost all of them have attended university abroad for shorter or longer periods. An old Icelandic proverb says, 'He that travels little, knows little.' Sending its young people to study abroad is one way the small island community will continue to thrive. Youngsters have to leave home to acquire knowledge and widen their horizons. Icelandic playwrights, actors, directors and technicians head primarily to Europe and America for their education and work experience. This is clearly evident in Icelandic drama: where on the one hand playwrights are attempting to define Icelanders and the Icelandic environment, they are also incorporating the influences exerted by contemporary ideologies that dominate theatre, whether it is surrealism, absurdism, psychologism, realism, neo-realism, structuralism or magical realism.

Are there any unique Icelandic subjects?

From its earliest times, Icelandic society has been centred on family and kinsmen. Within the medieval clan-based society the extended family served as the unit that linked people emotionally and economically, and thus provided the basis for a wide variety of tensions and conflicts. Icelandic literature of the Middle Ages is replete with dramatic narratives of the power struggles and clashes between families, and tragedies of love and jealousy pitted against family interests. Even today, conflicts within the family are a central focus for Icelandic playwrights, even though the family and its role have changed here as elsewhere. Icelandic plays naturally also deal with historical figures, class conflict, unemployment and the nuclear peril, gender conflicts, the narcotic scourge, rampant consumerism and environmental threats. There are of course also plays that do not deal directly with contemporary social or political questions, but with classic, existential questions, the eternal affairs of the soul.

Icelandic drama as an export product.

The smaller the nation or linguistic community behind the playwright, the more difficult it is for his or her works to cross the boundaries, tangible or invisible, dividing cultures and languages. Despite their extensive economic and cultural cooperation, the Nordic nations appear, for instance, to have only a limited interest in each other's drama. There are plenty of first-class playwrights in the Nordic countries, yet only a handful manages to cross over the borders of their neighbours. Yet even run-of-the-mill Anglo-Saxon writers manage to spread their wares everywhere and anywhere, supported by the irresistible strength of the Anglo-Saxon commercial establishment. A playwright

writing in a language understood by only 260,000 people obviously has a difficult time in presenting his work to other nations. Among the difficulties are, for instance: finding money for translation (the playwright usually pays for the translation himself); finding capable translators (who are few and far between, but do exist); finding a competent agent abroad (Icelandic society is too small for agents); and the fact that most theatres are reluctant to produce plays (never mind plays with large casts) by unknown playwrights from countries which people can hardly locate on a map of the world. These are the simple realities which an Icelandic playwright, like his colleagues in many other small countries, must acknowledge and learn to live with. Naturally, we can ask: Isn't it worthwhile to be a playwright of a nation which appreciates the quality of your work, whether or not they manage to make their way to other nations? Which it most certainly is, but at the same time it can be argued that it does a playwright good to have his work presented by other people, in another language, another social or cultural context - not to mention the economic gain. Such comparison is very useful; seeing their work, be it a novel, painting, music or play, in a new context can give authors new insights into themselves and their works, enable them to distinguish between what is peripheral and special and what is general and shared by humankind in the fare he offers his own nation or the nations of the world. Last but not least, it is worth pointing out that artistic revival often springs from the least expected of places, brought to the fore by poor and stubborn people from farms and villages who can offer city dwellers works rooted in eccentric, even unique, corners of human existence. An art in stark contrast to the many Hollywood movies produced for everyone, everywhere and at all times, which as a result are for no one, about no one, and never take place anywhere. But we are force-fed a steady diet of them, whether we like it or not.

What attempts are made to introduce our plays abroad?

- Playwrights themselves seek out translators and most often pay the cost of translations themselves.
- Public grants are offered which are sufficient to translate 2-3 plays into foreign languages each year.
- Icelandic playwrights find themselves agents abroad.
- The National Theatre sends its best productions to theatre festivals abroad.
- Theatre groups are invited to festivals abroad or they decide to take their productions on tour abroad.
- Foreign guest directors get to know Icelandic works on Icelandic stages and take the plays back with them when they return home and present them there.
- Nordic playwrights have an organization, Nordisk Dramatiker Union, NDU, which presents a Nordic playwright's award at two-year intervals. A few new plays are thus distributed among the Nordic nations each year.
- The European Broadcasting Union, EBU, has launched a campaign to publicize Icelandic radio drama which has brought some results.
- A very small number of Icelandic playwrights have written in foreign languages, especially in the early 20th century, when there was no professional theatre in Iceland (Jóhann Sigurjonsson, Guomundur Kamban).

How have Icelandic works fared abroad?

A few dozen Icelandic plays have been staged abroad. Several have been presented widely in Europe and America. The Icelandic playwright who has been most widely produced is Guðmundur Steinsson, whose works *Stundarfríður* (*A Moment's Peace*) and *Lúkas* (*Lucas*) have been produced extensively on both sides of the Atlantic. Other playwrights whose works have been shown abroad and are available in satisfactory translations include: Halldór Laxness, Jökull Jakobsson, Jónas Árnason, Kjartan Ragnarsson, Birgir Sigurðsson, Árni Ibsen, Ólafur Haukur Símonarson, Vigdís Grímsdóttir and Hrafnhildur Guðmundsdóttir.

SELECTED FACTS ON THE THEATRE IN ICELAND:

Professional theatre:

THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF ICELAND

Three stages, 523, 150 and 120 seats.

THE REYKJAVIK CITY THEATRE

Three stages, 550, 200 and 120 seats.

AKUREYRI THEATRE

Located in the town of Akureyri, North Iceland, 240 seats. A smaller stage, the Turner's Workshop, seating 150.

HERMÓDUR OG HÁDVÖR

Theatre in the town of Hafnarfjörður, south of Reykjavik. Two stages, 300 and 150 seats.

FLUGFÉLAGID LOFTUR (Loftur Airlines)

Theatre in Reykjavik. One stage, 400 seats.

MÖGULEIKHÚSID (Possibility Theatre)

Children's and Youth Theatre, own premises, 200 seats.

THE ICELANDIC OPERA

One stage, 500 seats.

THE ICELANDIC BALLET COMPANY

Operates in own premises, productions in the Reykjavik Theatre.

THE STUDENTS' THEATRE

Stage of the Dramatic Academy of Iceland, 100 seats.

INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

10-15 professional theatre groups, members of the Association of Icelandic

Professional Theatre Groups (BAAL). Productions in various locations.

2 PUPPET THEATRES with productions throughout Iceland and abroad, emphasizing innovative works based on Icelandic material.

ICELANDIC NATIONAL BROADCASTING - RADIO THEATRE

Produces some 50 dramatic productions for radio annually, half of them Icelandic works.

AMATEUR THEATRE GROUPS

Some 80 groups all around Iceland, members of the Association of Icelandic Amateur Theatres, with information and service centres in Reykjavik.

Italy

The situation of Italian playwriting*Mario Prospero and Nico Garrone*

The situation of playwriting in Italy is changing rapidly. For many years, after the Forties, as a reaction to nationalism and the isolation during the dictatorship, the main concern of producers and directors was to incorporate the many foreign traditions. They also wanted to revalue Italian classics with highly committed and prestigious productions.

Successful playwrights were Pirandello, Betti, Fabbri and De Filippo. We can add only a few other names to the list during the following three decades: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giovanni Testori, Giorgio Prospero, Luigi Squarzina, Peppino Patroni Griffi, Franco Brusati and Dario Fo. In the past ten years, though, many other names, still unknown abroad, have emerged out of a large, spontaneous movement: Michele Perriera, Manlio Santanelli, Ugo Chiti, Giuseppe Manfredi, Annibale Ruccello, Franco Scaldati, Enzo Moscato, Ruggero Cappuccio, Alberto Bassetti, Roberto Cavosi and many others.

The amount of the annual copyrights due by the theatres for Italian texts is about 65% of the total. In this figure one has to include proven classics, the evergreen Pirandello, the many authors of variety shows, comic sketches, adaptations of novels, and the vast archipelago of the amateur theatre.

Nevertheless, unlike film, where the Italian share in the market is no more than 10%, the main part of the theatrical market clearly belongs to Italian plays.

Trying to define themes, styles and tendencies is a difficult job. There are no clear and consistent features of what we conventionally call a 'dramaturgy'.

First, there's the chronic problem in Italy of the language. This problem is naturally enhanced in the theatre, where many spoken languages feature. Every playwright sticks to his preferred language. Neapolitan writers usually prefer the Neapolitan dialect, in which a rich secular tradition lives on. Venice, Milan, Genoa and Sicily all have their own recognized languages; Rome and even Tuscany, the birthplace of classical Italian, also boast local languages. This might suggest a trend towards naturalism, but this is only partly the case.

Writers like Enzo Moscato and Franco Scaldati have worked out a multi-layered hybrid language originating from an expressionist model. Their language, Neapolitan in the first case, Sicilian in the second, is full of allusions, lexical erudition, contaminations of Italian, English and French, personal idiosyncracies, and is hardly translatable.

Moscato's *Pièce noire* however, is a more conventional drama, which takes its inspiration from Genet's literary model. The scene is a brothel-like nocturnal Naples invaded by the American soldiers of the NATO naval base. Here, a mother whore and her gay children live out stories of promiscuity and despair. A playwright like Annibale Ruccello uses dialect and language fused in a naturalistic blend. However, in *Ferdinando*, his major work, the action is placed in the past century, with philologically accurate Neapolitan speech of the time. In *Weekend*, *Notturmo di donna con ospiti*, and *Le cinque rose di Jennifer*, metaphor and fable are the objective of his style, through and beyond a realistic dialogue.

Manlio Santanelli's works, *Uscita d'emergenza* and *Regina madre* are based on Neapolitan dialect. They have a metaphorical framework however, with the first one mindful of Beckett, the second, with its tormented prose, of Ibsen.

Michele Perriera, active in Palermo, writes in a rigorous and brilliant Italian. His themes are inspired by Orwell (1984) and Asimov. Behind social reality he tries to detect the hidden signs of an emerging technocratic dictatorship, veiled by fake philanthropy, emerging through the realms of mafia and its political connections.

The recent adaptation of Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Il pasticciaccio* by director Luca Ronconi, has added a famous novelist to the list of playwrights. The play shows daily life in Rome in the thirties, under the Fascist regime. Using the formal structure of a mystery, it is rich in moral and existential details. In the dramatization, both the narrative and the dialogues are spoken by the actors. The play is written in brilliant, literary Italian; the dialogue is in different dialects as the characters come from different regions.

Ugo Chiti wrote a trilogy which had great popular success. It is in the Tuscan vernacular, and shows a domestic provincial milieu in three different times in our century: *Paesaggio con figure* (1910), *Allegretto* (1930) and *La provincia di Jimmy* (1950). The final, most appreciated, play of this saga shows a family. The father is Lupo, a communist partizan who has been a war-hero during the Nazi occupation. He is contrasted with a son who shows homosexual inclinations and a growing religious vocation. Both are inexcusable weaknesses in the father's eyes. On the other hand, his daughter doesn't hide her desire to participate in beauty contests. She is also fascinated by movie stars, like the Jimmy of the title (James Dean: another non-virile type).

Giuseppe Manfredi owes his success mainly to a play about the private weaknesses of the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi, whose personality was split between serious talent and puerility. *Giacomo il prepotente* analyses the poet's family relations, especially with his sister Paolina. The drama is written in elegant verse. Manfredi has also concentrated on the jargon of football fans in two plays: *Teppisti* and *La partitella*, where it is treated with elaborated prosody and rhythm.

Alberto Bassetti's major work, *La tana*, deals with guilt and its complications. A group of young feminists takes revenge on a young man who raped a girl in the group. The rapist's victim, is found after some years by her ex-companions. She is hiding in a country house (her 'den') where she takes care of her own 'victim': the rapist who is now in a wheelchair after being shot. The dialogue is fluent and reproduces the rhetoric of revolutionary minorities in the seventies. It aims at creating a tragedy out of the contrast between cruel ideological abstraction and real consequences. A comic variation is the one-act play *Due sorelle* (*Two sisters*): one sister is an actress excluded from a variety show, the other a bourgeois who fritters away the inherited fortune with careless investments.

Roberto Cavosi's outstanding plays were *Rosanero*, *Luna di miele*, and *Maresciallo Butterfly*. His work can be associated with Bassetti's as far as style goes. It imitates real language without parody, does not characterize through dialect, and aims to create modern tragedy. *Rosanero* is a mafia story, a confrontation within a Sicilian family between two sisters: one represents mafia codes and behaviours, the other tries to retreat into anorexia and solitude. *Luna di miele* is an incest story: two members of the same Tuscan family, brother and sister, are transplanted into a northern province where the majority of the population is German. In their isolation, they imagine living a reciprocal love story, which turns into mirage-marriage which only veils their suicide plans. *Maresciallo Butterfly*

is about the marriage of a carabinieri's widow with a young Armenian immigrant. The woman's plan is to gain citizenship and afterwards reunite in Italy with her lover who still lives in Armenia. While the old husband takes his role as initiator of his wife to Italian culture and law very seriously, her lover dies in the war against Azerbaidzhan. The revelation of this fact drives the protagonists to harrowing confessions and leads to the old carabinieri's death.

Angelo Longoni's most successful plays are: *Naia*, a realistic representation of the life of a group of young men during military service. A young man is gradually isolated from the group and because he is so sensitive, he becomes the target of collective cruelty. He consequently falls into a depression and is driven to commit suicide. *Uomini senza donne* (Men without women) is a play about the experience of two male bachelors. One of them has determined to eliminate females from his life; neurosis and symmetric behaviour take the form of psychological farce.

Ruggero Cappuccio uses multilayered pastiches of different dialects, literary language and classical models, especially from ancient Greek theatre. Two plays recently presented on the stage of E.T.I. theatres were both inspired by masterpieces of literature. *Desideri mortali*, after Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo*, is a kind of frantic dithyramb, performed as a choral movement. Speech is in Sicilian and Neapolitan verse, a piano player and a percussionist lend rhythm to the acting. One of the performers was at times separated from the group and incarnated different characters; the central role shifts from Tomasi himself in the first part, to the prince of Salina in the second part, to his son in the third and last part. The action is not organized via dramaturgy: the work is mostly lyric and gestural. The pantomime of the dead, which encompasses the ritual of the performance as a *dance macabre*, is impressive. The second play is *Edipo a colono*, a blend of lyrics and stories from the saga of Oedipus. Both his daughters help him, the fatal death of his male children and the death of Oedipus himself at the end of an expressionistic calvary of physical and mental suffering. A playwright and director who deserves a mention in this list is Marco Martinelli, the leader of a theatre group from Ravenna, for the lyrical verses in the dialect of Romagna and for his language of symbols. Actors from places as far apart as Senegal and Ravenna create a desolate, apocalyptic panorama of tribal regression and homologation in *Ruh*. *Borifica* is a suggestive dialogue between a mother and her son based on the -marsh as a symbol of vitality is contrasted with the deadly action of reclaiming the marsh. The list is obviously incomplete, but we may not omit two plays by a successful novelist, Antonio Tabucchi. The first one, *Dialoghi mancati*, was directly written in form of theatrical dialogue, the second one, *Un sogno a Lisbona*, is an adaptation (by Alberto Bassetti) of the novel *Requiem*. Both plays are subtly concerned with the world of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa.

So far, we've listed exclusively male authors. However, there have been many relevant female authors. Their participation, in theatre groups and as writers, is a major aspect of contemporary Italian theatre. Initiatives are popping up at various levels. Dacia Maraini, well-known novelist in a realistic style close to Moravia's, has acted as a leader in the feminist theatre. Her plays have been translated into various languages and have reached audiences in many countries. We can quote among her many titles: *Don Giovanni*, *Fede*, *Clitennestra*, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa*, etc. From a feminist inspiration, with a more explicit, almost didactic social engagement, Maricla Boggio is known for plays like *Mamma eroina*. This is the tragedy of a simple-minded mother who fails to understand her daughter's malaise, the cause of her heroin addiction and her death due to an overdose. *Schegge* shows a dramatic panorama of social dissolution, crime and despair in destitute

neighbourhoods. The work of Raffaella Battaglini however, is totally different in style. It intentionally excludes naturalism or any kind of resemblance, and uses metaphors, abstractly placing the drama in the memory. It evokes the anguish of waiting on a frontier between dream and reality, present and past, life and death. *Conversazione per passare la notte* is a re-evocative dialogue between a mother and her daughter who have been seduced by the same man; they are in some mysterious place outside real space and time, a kind of purgatory of the mind, where the painful exploration of their past actions takes back to their consciousness the suffering and death of an innocent victim.

Antonia Brancati's major play, *Preoccupazione per Lalla*, is a black comedy about the mannerisms of the middle-aged professional milieu in Rome on the occasion of a party given by the hostess to inaugurate her and her husband's new home. The couple doesn't get on and will eventually split up during the party. A first half of the action consists of dialogues on the phone to arrange the party. The second half shows the party. Cynicism, disaffection, selfishness, idleness, and all possible commonplaces resulting from the lack of trust and respect, make up a social and emotional hell, where the noise of collective chewing, and the concert of voices that praise the tasty food is the background for empty and desperate existence.

The list could obviously continue, but other questions must be answered. Is this body of Italian plays we are trying to describe present on the international scene? And if so, how much? It appears that it is only occasionally brought to foreign stages.

The anarchy it embodies, its ever-changing forms, its many local languages, the flowing empiricism, the profound pessimism, the problem of unresolved identity, all have a negative effect on the diffusion abroad.

The principal institutions in Italy that promote plays are:

1. the Foreign Ministry through the Italian Cultural Institutes;
2. the Department of Stage Performances;
3. the E.T.I. (Ente Teatrale Italiano);
4. the IDI (Institute for Italian Drama);
5. the S.I.A.E. (Society of Italian authors and Publishers).

The following data were kindly supplied by Andrea Porcheddu of the E.T.I. and refer to the years 1994, 95 and 96.

The Italian Cultural Institutes (90 in 57 countries) have presented in one year (1995) only 14 initiatives concerning 'dramaturgy'. Of these, the only ones relevant to 20th century theatre were:

1. *I giganti della montagna* by Pirandello, produced by Piccolo Teatro, directed by Strehler, was presented in New York.
2. *Nunzio* by Spiro Scimone was presented in Montreal.
3. Director Enrico Frattaroli presented *Il tamburo di fuoco* by E.T. Marinetti in Cairo.
4. *Rasoi*, from texts of Enzo Moscato, directed by Mario Martone, has toured through Europe and Americas.

The activity of IDI in the diffusion of Italian twentieth century dramaturgy has focussed since 1994 on a collaboration with I.I.C. of Krakow. In the first Festival there, in 1995, three plays were presented: *Pranzo di famiglia* by Robert Lerici, *Ari Ari* from the writing of Italo Calvino; *La Stazione* di Umberto Marino.

IDI initiated the translation of some other Italian plays into various languages: *Un cielo senza nuvole*

by Luca De Bei into French (it was produced in Bruxelles); *De Pretore Vincenzo* by Eduardo De Filippo into Gaelic; *Il Presidente* by Rocco Familiari into Czech; *Scacco pazzo* by Vittorio Francesco into French; *Mi voleva Strehler* by Umberto Simonetta and Maurizio Micheli into French; *La trota, Volare*, and other pieces by Dario D'Ambrosi into English.

The IDI led an ongoing operation in Paris through the Centre Text under the direction of Mario Moretti. For four years in a row, the Center has promoted a Festival of contemporary Italian plays. Among the stage presentations were: Giuseppe Manfridi's *Ti amo, Maria*, Luigi Lunari's *Tre sull'altalena*, Franco Brusati's *La donna sul letto*. Plays read were: Roberto Cavosi's *Rosanero*, Luca Archibugi's *La morte di Marcello Puddu*, Annibale Ruccello's *Ferdinando*, Ruggero Cappuccio's *Delirio marginale*.

The Italian Society of Authors and Publishers (S.I.A.E.), primarily concerned with collecting copyrights, also does promotional work. In Paris it organized an award for the best translations (into French) of Italian plays. In 1993 it was given to Jean Paul Manganaro for translating Giovanni Tesotri's *Ambleto*, to Delia Masson Corfini for Giorgio Prosperi's *L'affascinante Anton Pavlovic*, to Karin Wackers for Dino Buzzati's *La colonna infame*.

In spite of the recently intensified activities by these institutions, we must recognize that generally Italian plays are only known outside the country through certain classics from before 1990. Eduardo De Filippo is the most translated and staged author abroad; after him we find Pirandello and Dario Fo. Among the playwrights that follow in the list, we find Aldo Nicolai, Diego Fabbri, Giorgio Prosperi, Natalia Ginzburg and Dacia Maraini. After 1990 the presence of a new Italian play is even more occasional and isolated.

Besides the institutional initiatives listed above, no spontaneous work of a certain relevance and continuity can be documented.

Finally, something about the proportion of new plays staged in Italy, and an evaluation of their possible diffusion in the foreseeable future. The number of new plays staged every year has constantly increased in the last decade. From a hopeless scarcity, causing tough protests by the playwrights, the number of productions of new Italian plays has now reached about 500. The promotional institutions have been overwhelmed by this mostly spontaneous, anti-economic, and in some way furious growth. Traditional means of selection are proving insufficient. A board of specialists who give the green light for one or two scripts to be translated and sometimes a budget to afford a production, can hardly keep up with the abundance on offer.

Most of the productions we refer to are located in minor, often minuscule theatres. Vertical movement from these interesting but often malfunded spaces to commercial theatres or even to the Olympus of Dramatic Art (such as the Teatri Stabili) is exceptional.

We have to point out though, two significant phenomena for the promotion of new playwriting.

1) Since two years, E.T.I has named the Teatro Valle in Rome as the house of contemporary Italian playwriting. The theatre's repertoire is based entirely on selected plays by living Italian authors.

2) The Teatro Stabile of Trieste has just announced the second edition of an annual Festival dedicated to new Italian plays: 42 productions, some created in residence and many by guest-companies, are presented to the public in a busy programme lasting the month of May.

Yes, Italian playwriting is rapidly coming to existence. ■

Latvia

"No more words" or what is modern Latvian drama like?

Baiba Tjarve

"No More Words" writes the Latvian drama writer Peteris Petersons in his latest play. Words are the basis of everything. With the help of words we can say feelings that can't be expressed. Yet a word can also kill feelings. In the theatre as well: too many words can easily kill it, and our times have killed the word.

During the Soviet era, we expressed everything between the lines. At the end of the eighties, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we spoke out on subjects prohibited up to then. Now it seems that we have spoken too much, that we have expressed everything there was to express. Words have become superfluous. It seems that we finally have to stop bothering the audience with words, words, words.

However, the national drama is based mainly on words. That is also the main factor that keeps it from becoming international drama - one understandable to a foreign audience.

What are the qualities by which you can distinguish between drama that's understandable to everybody and drama that's important only for the native speaker? I shall try to answer this central question by analysing contemporary Latvian drama.

Statistics?!

Many or few? Good or bad? Who is writing plays, where, when and why? It is a rather complicated task to find answers to such simple questions. There are people who have announced the death of Latvian drama in the reborn Republic of Latvia. There are no clear examples of the existence of professional and regular playwriting. Starting with the end of the eighties, the situation regarding the different aspects of modern drama has changed a lot.

Few opportunities to publish plays exist. Only one edition of selected contemporary plays has been published during this period. Plays are generally published in two periodicals: 'Theatrical Messenger', a review of performing arts and 'Banner', a literary review. But it publishes only two to three plays per year. The same goes for the staging of Latvian contemporary drama. One production per year in each theatre would be an optimistic tally. Such a number was reached only in 1995. From 1990 till 1994 there were three to four productions of contemporary Latvian drama in all seven professional state subsidized theatres put together.

The status of the playwright in society has changed as well: there are only two or three authors that we can call professional dramatists. However, even their work is reminiscent of a kind of underground movement or work in a forbidden sect because nobody knows what they have written.

Usually the process of choosing dramas for public presentation is uncoordinated. Until recently, no institution could mediate between the theatre and playwrights. During Soviet times the Ministry of Culture carried out this task. Everybody was used to this authority dictating an obligatory number of

Latvian drama productions per year. The situation has completely changed now: at last playwrights and theatre directors are aware that nobody except themselves can choose the repertoire.

At the beginning of the nineties the national awakening coincided with a cessation of interest in the national drama. The audience's attitude towards the theatre changed a lot too. Because of social problems and lack of money, people did not go to the theatre any more, but withdrew into a circle of close friends and family. Theatre and drama lost their operative function in people's lives and stopped being traditional reference points. The theatre tried to hide its confusion by producing comedies and entertainment. While looking for who was to blame, the theatre broke its relations with dramatists. However, nothing is stable: the situation developed and in the mid-nineties the theatre and the playwrights had reached some kind of reconciliation. More than ever the necessity of an intermediary between the theatre and dramatists was felt.

Some authors started to produce their own work. Several playwrights translated their plays, sent them to international contests or established contacts with drama agencies in other countries. For example, Egils Šnore, author of *Twelve and Half Constellations* and Ārijs Geikins, author of *Host*, entered their plays in a German competition for European plays, and later signed an agreement to distribute their plays in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Because they felt ill-informed and had little contact with authors, some directors started to write plays for their own productions. As people from the theatre were writing them, plays became more theatrical. On the other hand these plays did not conform to the basic rules of drama theory. Another feature: there were more 'made to order' dramatizations. Very often these dramatizations were turned into independent plays. However, the number of contemporary Latvian plays performed in the theatres was small.

In 1995 the National Theatre of Latvia organized a competition of modern Latvian drama. We presumed that the genre had expired, but the competition proved the opposite to be true. Fifty-six plays were entered. No jury of the usual kind was made. The only criterion was: do any of the directors of the National Theatre want to stage one of the plays? This is the reason why we can't consider the four plays picked out to be the best ones.

On the other hand this competition was productive because it made the situation in modern Latvian drama very clear. Unfortunately, the plays have not been published, but they are available to theatres. In 1996 they did not organize the competition again. Competitions like this could be a solution to improve the uneasy relationship between the theatre and playwrights.

A less haphazard way of going about it, would be the creation of a database of Latvian plays. Fortunately, the new Latvian Drama Agency has recently taken this up. This is the only institution which has made a start with the regular collection of information on contemporary drama. It has also started setting up international relationships with foreign agencies, theatres, directors etc. It is too early yet to assess both the principles or the results of their work. Nevertheless, it may be the best way of promoting Latvian drama both in Latvia and abroad.

What is the mission of modern Latvian drama?

Gunārs Priede, the 'old master' of Latvian drama, writes in the introduction to his latest play, "A dramatist must not stay aloof from topical problems. The mission of the theatre is to assist in resolving the most urgent problems of its nation."

I feel a little bit old-fashioned when I analyse the content of literature in relation to the times. Such an approach has little to do with modern theory of literature. But I suppose that both Latvian playwrights and critics are a bit archaic in this respect.

Latvian drama generally plays an active role in the discussion of topical problems. Often it deals with specific subjects that only native speakers can understand. This kind of drama is particularly important during a period of crucial change in political and economical life. However, as time passes, the play loses its significance. It is unable to transcend the borders of time and space. Usually these topical plays lack quality too. Their importance lies in their social or political aspects. Staging such plays in other countries and in other languages is practically impossible.

This political tradition relates to the history of Latvian literature. During Soviet times, plays and theatre performances often had a double meaning. At the end of the eighties, it became less necessary for the theatre to speak between the lines. At the same time national self-awareness proclaimed itself vociferously. The theatre had a quite strange relation with the plays: the plays sometimes even went across the borders of literature and theatre. Reality was more interesting than the illusion of life on the stage. People were flocking to political meetings; political television programmes and government meetings took over the role theatre performances previously held.

As a result of this, playwrights became jealous of TV: they tried to keep up with TV by developing a drama version of 'revolver journalism'. Usually playwrights didn't reach great depths when referring to urgent problems: they tried to attract audiences by using the principle of identification.

As we know from the history of the theatre, 'revolver journalism' can be successfully developed only when there is a close cooperation between writer and director. But during this period, no such close relationship between them existed; neither was it possible to get their work published quickly.

I can mention only a few plays that were staged successfully.

Pauls Putnīšs wrote bright tragicomedies that revealed his attitude towards the new reality. In line with the aesthetics of comedy, primitive types dominate his plays. They are the witty evidence of social changes. *With Hut to the Church* was staged at the National Theatre in 1987, and it was a quick public reference to current events.

Another example is the production of Raimonds Staprāns' play *Four Days in June*. The play was written as an intellectual drama. It is a documentary about events in 1940, when President Kārlis Ulmanis received an ultimatum to let the Russian tanks roll in. It was performed in the president's castle, in the same room where the fateful decision to let Russian army cross the border of Latvia was taken by the President.

Many of the more recent plays deal with the actual social and political situation in Latvia. The low level of these plays raises two questions: is it possible for literature to reflect on events that happened only the other day, and what is the way to reflect these events? These plays present only some typical characters and are highly situational - that's all.

Latvian drama writers are obviously more interested in the present, instead of applying themselves to the future. They rarely try to catch the mood of an approaching age - always a sign of good literature.

Still, it is not only a sign of quality in modern drama. It is also a sign of the times: if we are obscure about the future, we have a nearsighted view of the present. Maybe art and literature can help to understand our present situation, and establish values?

The founder of poetic theatre in Latvia, director and playwright Pēteris Pētersons, gave his latest play the title *No More Words*. Through accurate metaphors he shows our present situation in another dimension. The problem is what to do with the word that kills.

Another drama which reveals a profound view of the present situation is *Hetaera from the other side of the river* by Gunārs Priede. The events take place in a remote corner of Latvia in an institution for mentally ill children. A traditional symbol of the artist used in classical Latvian drama - the harp - is delivered to the director of this school. The playwright makes clear that the art of Latvia, and its future, are mentally ill too. Probably even these fine plays can only be understood by people in Latvia. To become comprehensible to other nationalities, we have to search for drama that possesses different qualities.

Creation of Myths

Myths in Latvian drama are a different story. Myths also look for an answer to the question how to reflect current events in drama. But plays with a mythical quality transfer this problem from an external, verbal level to a structural one. Some dramatists have used myths in a literal way: by choosing ancient mythology as a basis of their plays.

Dainis Grīnvalds has written several plays about the ancients. The best of them is *Cassandra*. The playwright follows the myth about a woman who is damned by her capacity to foresee the future because nobody believes her. Dainis Grīnvalds puts Cassandra in the contemporary world - nothing has changed, people still are deaf and blind to their past mistakes. The play has a concentrated dialogue that balances between the desperate absurdity of modern drama and a classical approach where God's strict rules exist and catharsis is still possible.

Cosmogony is the basis of *Twelve and Half Constellations* by Egils Špore. He traces the origin, creation and evolution of the universe. The famous poetess Māra Zālīte also creates myths. She has written dramatic poems based on Latvian folklore. They reveal a clear model of a society where an irrepressible belief in the future and in positive values dominates. These last three plays develop the same question through symbolism: the national awakening of Latvians, a gradual disappointment in their dreams and finally the farewell to intelligence from those who have obtained power and betrayed their belief.

The third part of this 'trilogy' about the relation between ideals and reality was written in 1995. *Wild Swans* (based on Andersen's tale) is a tragic view on how dreams are crushingly defeated. Reality is presented with grotesque irony. For the intelligentsia such a reality is not acceptable, and they are forced to leave it. In some respect it is Māra Zālīte's poetic answer to the vital matter of a society where the intelligentsia does not actively participate in everyday social and political life.

According to Jan Kott, tragedy is impossible in the modern world. Usually it is transformed into some sort of comedy or tragicomedy. In Latvian contemporary drama, these genres dominate as well: drama, comedy, farce or just play. Tragedy however has survived in its classical form in contemporary Latvian Drama thanks to the use of myths.

Myths also create a vast and complicated structure of relationships and events. A myth always keeps its basic structure, even when the playwright fails in filling in the structure with exact words, details, and purpose. Plays with such a universal structure are more universal in their objectives, subject and goal.

Reflection of New Reality

In the past years we could distinguish two extremes both in everyday life and drama: the political or the apolitical approach. In drama we find both public references to everyday life and profound insights into man's inner world, into invisible changes of life. Often it's the more apolitical plays that give a better testimony about our time, our spiritual mood and our feelings than those dramas that speak directly about bankrupt banks as a reason for man's despair.

Life has changed a lot, and dramatists have lost stable referencepoints. How do they reflect the new reality and life's confusion?

The way in which the world changes is often examined by using non-traditional literary styles: absurdism, surrealism, postmodernism. They represent a reality that is crushed and smashed into small pieces. A new world is formed from these fragments.

Many performances in the Latvian theatre are evidence of the rebirth of absurd drama. Evidently, the present situation and atmosphere show remarkable similarities to that of absurdism in the fifties and sixties: reality is deceptive, we cannot find definite criteria for any phenomenon. Understanding a feverish world with the help of common sense is impossible.

Leide Stumbre is a middle-aged Latvian dramatist whose plays are staged regularly because of their theatrical atmosphere. Characteristic features of her work are absurdism and surrealism. The main characters usually live inside a closed quarters proving that contact among people is impossible or an illusion. Women are 'waiting for Godot'. Men are usually tramps with poetic souls; the meaning of their lives lies 'on the road'. Her latest dramas, *Strangers Here, Murder and Murder*, and *Feathers* show closed rooms full of passions. There is no way out of this senseless world except by dying.

Nine Short Plays is a brilliant example of fantastic realism. An individual takes on nine shapes in nine short plays that are about loss of integrity and personality.

One of the best and most professional dramatists is Lauris Gundars. He has written several plays based on novels: Abbe Prevost's *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* and Anton Chechov's *The Duel*. He is also a director and has staged his own untraditional version of *Hamlet* (Liepāja Theatre, 1994). It can in fact be considered as a new play, because text fragments are put in a new order. It is a shining example of postmodernism in the Latvian theatre. All the characters and the entire plot are shown as a result of Hamlet's fantasy.

In his latest play too, *Wagner will not return* (about Richard Wagner in Latvia), we feel his perfect sense of the theatre: characters with inner action, a play which shows his evolution in every scene, has changes of rhythm and meaningful psychology in its characters.

Dramas by Jānis Jurkāns make excellent theatre too. *Pool in a Marsh* is about intimate relationships between people. It has very precise dialogues with short, abrupt phrases and laconic discussions, carried by a parallel inner stream of consciousness and action. The play's end is open: its interpretation is up to the director and spectators. We can rate this play among the best dramas in Latvian literature. It proves that an apolitical approach to man's soul and inner world give values and qualities understandable to everybody. The external transformations of the state system are better expressed by the changes in man's inner life, and by despair and surrealistic disorder, than by loud words about financial crises. Maybe we need to be silent for a while to gather insight into the inner structure of life and people. I return to the beginning of my report, reminding you of the title of Pēteris Pēterson's play: *No More Words...*

Lithuania

Some aspects of Lithuanian playwriting*Gytis Padegimas*

We celebrate the 450th anniversary of the first Lithuanian book this year. However, one could say that drama was never as abundant as prose or poetry in Lithuanian literature. This genre is just roughly a hundred years old, if you look at works written in Lithuanian. The first plays were created for amateur theatre companies at the turn of the century. Even then, the Czarist regime forbade literature in the Lithuanian language. This is one of the main reasons for the late emergence of a Lithuanian national dramaturgy.

The situation changed when the first professional theatre to play in Lithuanian was established in 1920 at Kaunas. Classical authors of Lithuanian literature, like Maironis (1862-1932), Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893-1967), Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius (1882-1954), and Balys Sruga (1896-1947), wrote tragedies and dramas in the twenties and thirties, based mostly on national history. Petras Vaiciūnas (1890-1959), an author of well-made plays based on actual events, was the most popular playwright of this period. A very special place in the pantheon of playwrights at that time is occupied by Vydūnas, who created many mysterious pieces influenced by the Orient and theosophy.

In the fifteen years after World War II the most interesting Lithuanian dramas were written by Antanas Škėma (1911-1961), Algirdas Landsbergis (1924) and Kazys Ostrauskas (1926), who were all in exile in the USA. These three very different playwrights had studied modern western drama. They mixed this experience with the painful experience of exile to yield some quite original fruits in the field of drama. During the past years some of their plays have been produced on Lithuanian stages. Some of them are translated into English, and in my opinion, they could be of interest to the international theatre community. (I include a short resume of A. Škėma's piece *Ataraxia*).

The Renaissance of drama in Lithuania started in the Cruschiov era.

Juozas Grušas (1901-1986) wrote his historical play *Herkus Mantas* about the Prussian struggle against Teutons. Written in 1957, it broke many Soviet taboos. From that time on Lithuanian drama became more influenced by a spiritual resistance against the totalitarian regime. Justinas Marcinkevičius' (1930) poetic trilogy *Mindaugas*, *Mazvydas* and *Cathedral*, shows the highly significant periods in the development of Lithuanian culture. However, when it was premiered it didn't cause people to throng the streets, as happened in Poland on the occasion of the first night of Mickiewicz's *Dziady*. Nevertheless, it played an important role in increasing the self-consciousness of our society. Both in his historical dramas and his plays based on contemporary life, Grušas never missed an opportunity to boggle the mind of the conformist 'Homo Sovieticus'. The subject of his drama is slightly akin to the subject of Kieslowsky's cinema of moral anxiety. Grušas' hero is Don Quixote, fighter and believer in conformist society.

Both Juozas Grušas and Justinas Marcinkevičius used traditional techniques in their plays, with some innovative elements. Kazys Saja (b.1932), a very productive playwright, was the first to fully use the modern dramatic techniques of the time in his plays. He constructed his hyperboles by mixing

allegoric subjects with sarcastic sentences. At last there was someone who spoke about the wounds in the human soul.

A little bit later, Juozas Glinskis (b.1933) was influenced by the 'Theatre of cruelty'. This fact, combined with his nonconformism, was reason enough for the Soviet censorship to prohibit some of his pieces.

In the sixties and seventies, Saulius Šaltenis (b.1945) created a very special kind of drama by presenting on stage an array of simple small village people, whom he described with lyricism, irony and tenderness and nostalgia. His non-heroic leading characters had great care for simple values and real feelings in an epoch of total untruth. These "poets with the fists of boxers" were able to fight to protect these values too.

A number of female playwrights entered drama from prose in the 1970's and '1980's. Vidmantė Jasukaitytė (b.1948), Ema Mikulėnaitė (b.1935), Jurga Ivanauskaitė (b.1961), and Gražina Mareckaitė (b.1939), brought an impressionistic line of writing to Lithuanian playwriting, and some feminist issues of the period too.

Summarizing, we can say that in the thirty years from about 1957 to 1988, Lithuanian drama developed rapidly, mastering both contemporary subjects and techniques. The Lithuanian playwrights strongly influenced their readers and especially their audiences and they played a pre-eminent role in preparing the renewal of independence in the year 1988.

Because of this, the most interesting of them (Saulius Šaltenis, Kazys Saka, Juozas Glinskis and Vidmante Jasukaiyte) became members of Parliament, editors of big newspapers or ministers, and ceased to write plays. In the autumn of 1988, a festival of Lithuanian drama was organized at the Shiauliai dramatic theatre. Every Lithuanian theatre company presented new work there, or plays that had been banned, including texts by exiled Lithuanian playwrights. This festival was very important both as a cultural and as a political event, stimulating a growing independence movement.

In the period between about 1988 and 1993, the most important and most interesting dramas in Lithuania were not staged in the theatre. In this period, the favourite works of critics were used, which were adapted to dramatically reflect every period of crisis. During this period and after, many Lithuanian theatres staged newly 'discovered' Western dramas. These 'discoveries' and the playwrights' silence were the main reasons why very few Lithuanian plays have appeared on stage in the past seasons.

But there is some hope that the situation will soon improve. Two years ago, The Ministry of Culture organized a competition of performances of Lithuanian plays. The winning theatres get money earmarked for staging new Lithuanian pieces.

There are some new names in playwriting at the horizon in Lithuania. Sigitas Parulskis (1965), a young poet, made his debut with a highly original mixture of Lithuanian folklore and absurdist drama in a play called *From the life of the dead souls*. The play describes the adventures of a dead man, who doesn't realize he is dead. The playwright reveals the spiritual state of society and its people after the communist era. One could call this play postmodernistic.

Mark Zinger (b.1947), a poet and essayist, described the different fates of neighbours in the multicultural courtyard of his infancy. (A resume of this piece is included). The veteran of Lithuanian playwriting, Karijs Saja has written a new play, *The egg of Ibis*, returning to drama after having been in politics.

S. Šaltenis' piece *Scat, the Death always scat* was staged in Hungary and Romania; J. Marcinkevičius' historical drama *Mindaugas* has been done in some of the former Soviet republics; one play by J. Glinskis, about life of Soviet prisoners, was staged in New York, without mentioning the author's name.

There are only a few modern Lithuanian dramas at the moment, but I would like to draw your attention to plays by J. Grušas, S. Šaltenis, K. Saja, J. Glinskis and some other authors that wrote in an earlier period. Of course there are the dramas of exiled Lithuanian authors too. I hope that some of these plays are of interest to theatres in other country as well.

P.S. Just as I was writing this report, I got a call from a female playwright. She had just finished a new play. Maybe this call is a sign of a hope and fulfilment or the future of Lithuanian drama.

Resume of Markas Zingeris' Play *Around the fountain, or little Paris*

The play is set in Lithuania, the Baltic country which reappeared on the world stage recently from the ruins of the Soviet empire. It is a corner of Europe largely unknown to the world, which makes it a sort of fairy tale country.

The main characters are: a Russian Grand Ballerina, escaping to Paris but leaving behind her infant daughter and her daughter Leonara, who grows up in a Paris theatre where she later works as a seamstress. She dresses her mother in the costume of *L'oiseau de feu*, but they never recognize each other.

Then there's the ballerina's grandson, who grew up in poverty in Lithuania and is later arrested by the KGB for dancing a Latin American dance on a top of a burning police car. He dies in a prison cell. His father, director of a School of Music, ends up as a courtyard drunkard, pestering The Author with his confessions.

Also a KGB mayor and later the General Jajichnitsa (General Fried Eggs or General Omelet) who dominates the scene and interrogates the school director after World War II and, many years later, his son too.

The play is a full-scale narrative, so episodic characters make their appearance occasionally, like Picasso, the possessive and lively lover of the Ballerina, who wants her body and soul. There is the Horse with its beer wagon, who learned to salute Stalin and Hitler both in Russian and in German. We see the Angel of Death whose name in the courtyard is Bird. He is a crook who seduces the Courtyard Blonde to pull the golden teeth from the deceased in the city morgue. He kills The Author's childhood buddy, who is courting the Courtyard Blonde. The events are witnessed by a smart spectacled boy "from a French teacher's decent family", who is the Author himself as a child. Almost all these characters die by their own hands or from some fatal disease. When Leonara hangs herself in occupied Lithuania, her mother does the same in postwar Paris.

The play is based on fantastic real-life stories which are common knowledge in this part of Europe, which was so often caught up in the catastrophes of history during this century, and before.

It starts and ends around the Fountain as The Author goes through his memories like 'a memory

tourist'. It ends with group photograph and two lines from a popular Lithuanian song, praising the virtues of the country. The Angel of Death quickly grabs the Author character by the hair, while he's in the midst of the group. The photograph is taken by the spectacled boy.

Some twenty actors (counting both the main and episodic roles) are involved, though about five characters can be played by the same actor since they appear in different episodes.

The dialogues are sharp, witty and funny, and very subtle in the lyrical scenes, though the metaphors and illusions are capable of crossing borders. Sometimes Lithuanian slang and local references are used to depict the characters.

In the first act, The Author finds himself at his old childhood courtyard Fountain. Gradually, as he starts his narration, the strange people that surrounded him many years ago reappear. The Author starts off as a 'memory tourist' and ends being involved with his characters to the point of life and death. What he discovers is that he has lived with the real martyrs: down-to-earth people who are very humane. Sometimes they are comic and even grotesque, but they did their best to keep their human dignity under adverse conditions.

Markas Zingeris, the author of this play, is an award-winning Lithuanian poet, fiction-writer and essayist. Since Lithuanian independence, he writes monthly contributions for the Lithuanian cultural weekly "Northern Athens". He is a member of the Lithuanian PEN Centre and the Writer's Union. His poems have been published in France, Holland, Germany and Russia; his essays and short-stories have found much acclaim among Lithuanian and international readers. This play is his first work for the stage. Here he makes good use of his language and of his ability to charm the audience through plot and suspense.

The premiere of *Around the Fountain, or Little Paris* was on 12 October 1996 at the Kaunas State Academic Drama Theatre. The event was widely publicized by the Lithuanian media.

Resume of Antanas Skèma's play *Ataraxia*

Ataraxia by Antanas Skèma is a one-act play for seven persons. In Greek the word 'ataraxia' means quietness, peace of mind. That is what Gluosnis and Isaac, the main heroes of the play, are looking for.

A personal file of Gluosnis: born in Lithuania, a member of the Lithuanian national movement that strives to recapture the times of Vytautas Magnus. In 1940, when the Soviets occupied Lithuania, he was imprisoned and tortured by a person of Jewish origin, called Isaac, who was a member of the Jewish national movement that strives to recapture the times of Moses.

Isaac's nationalism allowed him a choice of communism. In 1941 when the Germans occupied Lithuania, Isaac happened to be in a garage where Gluosnis was as well. With the approval of the SS men, he murdered - or attempted to murder - Isaac with a military dagger.

Further events: Gluosnis escaped to Germany and then to the USA, escaping death in concentration camps. Isaac emigrated to the USA too.

Looking for each other, they meet in a strange office. Every excitement loses its sense if it is repeated at certain intervals, they observe.

A long theoretical monologue explains that through this experience, repeated a certain number of times, Gluosnis has to come back to the embryo state, innocent.

They will have to relive the torments and the murder, but they are not sure about the details. And yet, they must be exact. They discuss the circumstances and the details of the event. They are pressed by the authorities.

During the process, they confess sympathy and love to each other. They have found out that they don't want to repeat the incidents. For that reason, they kill the supervisor of that strange office together. A kiss of peace. At last they have found Ataraxia. ■

Macedonia

Macedonian plays and playwrights on a long journey across borders

Žanina Mirčevska

Macedonian playwriting, from the point of view of its linguistic limits, is one of the smallest members of the family of world playwriting. It was born and has developed in a country with less than two million citizens, a country which has gone through and is still going through a turbulent period in history, with regards to the defence of its identity and its international recognition.

The Macedonian historical context is a drama in its own right, but on this occasion I don't want to talk about that kind of drama. It is an unquestionable fact however, that the historical context is reflected in the identity of Macedonian plays. The identity of Macedonian playwriting is the result of a respectable cultural heritage. But the most respectable thing about it is its continuity, in spite of the historical turmoil that has taken place on Macedonian soil for centuries. In the past Macedonian playwriting scrambled to survive, today it tries to move across its ethnic and geographical borders, and this is the very subject matter of this article.

Not only has Macedonia internationally been recognized as an independent country since 1992, but it has been a genuine, distinct cultural entity since time immemorial. The roots of Macedonian theatrical tradition go back to antiquity. A number of excavated ancient theatres are proof of theatrical activity on Macedonian soil. It is a heritage put together out of a mixture of cultures on our soil, which would deserve to be studied thoroughly. But on this occasion I would like to comment on the artefacts of written drama only, in particular on those that succeeded to cross the Macedonian border.

The history of Macedonian playwriting started in 1851. Jordan Hadji-Konstantinov Djinot is the author of the first Macedonian play that has been preserved. But the real foundations of Macedonian playwriting began with Vojdan Cernodrinski, whom the audience widely appreciated at the beginning of this century. One may speak of a Macedonian classical dramaturgy, represented by the playwrights Vasil Iljovski, Anton Panov and Risto Krle. Despite their appeal to a wide audience, they were continually confronted with problems because of the historical context of the time in which they wrote.

Due to Macedonia's constant servitude, its language was not recognized as an official language before 1945. The official languages on the Macedonian stages were Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian or Serbian. This depended on which country happened to have conquered Macedonia at the time. In spite of the permanent denial of the Macedonian language, some writers persistently wrote in their native language, i.e. in their native dialect. Dialect, because at that time the Macedonian language as such did not exist. Grammatical standardization was not officially allowed, but there was wide acceptance of the dialect. Also, our history of drama is full of plays written by the writers mentioned above. These plays have been performed as plays written in the "Macedonian dialect". According to historical documents these plays were received by the Macedonian audience with great interest and respect. One of the main reasons for this was the very fact that they were written in the native

language. Scientific research reveals that, after the introduction of plays in Macedonian, theatres in Macedonia were visited by a permanent large audience. Prior to this, the only regular visitors were a small group of foreign diplomats and missionaries who were only interested in plays in a foreign language. After achieving success on the domestic stages, some of the Macedonian plays were also staged abroad. One of the most successful was *Emigrant Workers* by Anton Panov, written in 1936. It was performed regularly outside Macedonia.

Apart from these few cases of successful Macedonian plays, one may conclude that due to the historical repression of the Macedonian language and culture, we can talk of a stagnation in Macedonian playwriting.

Finally, Macedonian was institutionalized as an official language in Macedonia after 1945. Since then all Macedonian playwrights write in their language, permanently contributing to the development of the Macedonian language and culture.

According to statistics, more than thirty plays by Macedonian playwrights have been performed on foreign stages in the 1936 -1993 period.

I will mention only a few that have been frequently performed abroad. Kole Casule is perhaps the first author whose plays have been produced in English, Italian, Polish, Russian, Croatian, Slovenian and in other languages. Goran Stefanovski, one of the most successful Macedonian playwrights so far, has been staged in more than ten countries, and is still one of the most active writers, writing regularly - not only in Macedonian but also in English. Jordan Plevnes, another very successful playwright, lives and works in France, writing in Macedonian and in French.

The youngest generation consists of some playwrights who might do well in the future. Despite their youth, some of them have already successfully crossed the borders. I mention Jugoslav Petrovski, who has been performed in England, Dejan Dukovski and Sasko Nasev, who have both been staged in Yugoslavia, and myself, Zanina Mircevska, with plays done in Yugoslavia and in Slovenia.

Profound and devoted research should precede any analysis. As a representative of the youngest generation of Macedonian playwrights, the rest of my article will concentrate primarily on my personal experience of the status of contemporary playwriting in Macedonia and about its problems on its travels across borders.

One can say that there are interesting playwrights among the youngest generation in Macedonia who in my opinion have a lot to say - not only to domestic stages but also to stages worldwide. All of them have a personal style based on a personal voice. It is hard to detect a mainstream, or a trend, in Macedonian contemporary dramaturgy. I consider the variety of these many different voices and styles as a great treasure to a culture.

In some larger European or American centres young playwrights can't reach the stages of bigger theatres as easily as we can reach our main stages. Foreign colleagues of mine have to wait until they mature enough to become respected and are represented by an agent. The reason is clear. There is more competition in countries with world languages, compared to my country where there are only Macedonian plays by Macedonian authors. Original works in the native language are always eagerly awaited. That's why domestic playwriting has a privileged status compared to foreign work. In Macedonia the media focus a great deal of attention on any new domestic work by any writer. The major interest in domestic plays in my country sometimes has negative effects. Some theatres even accept works in progress now, or works by students as contributions to the repertoire. Young

writers and students benefit greatly from this, but I consider these works as noncompetitive in the world market.

Young writers abroad, writing in "bigger" languages, usually start their career with informal groups or in fringe theatres. Unfortunately, the Macedonian theatre community doesn't have fringe stages or established stages for work in progress. That's why the promotion of young writers usually occurs directly on the main stages.

The ease with which Macedonian writers may access domestic stages turns into an endless muddle when they try to cross borders.

Linguistic problems are a major barrier. Every one of us is faced with this problem, whether you are a young and upcoming writer or an established and well-known author. We are all aware of the limitations of our domestic stage. There is a permanent desire to be read across the borders. Only one way to solve this problem exists: to have the plays TRANSLATED. A continual quest for good translators is the result.

Usually, we translate plays which have already been staged in some of our professional theatres. That way we have already received feedback from our domestic audience. Through our audiences we check how a play works. If the result is satisfactory, we try to find a translator and to have the play marketed abroad.

As I mentioned before, only some writers write well enough in a foreign language to be staged directly abroad. A more frequent and accepted practice is to have plays translated by a professional translator. Still, according to my personal experience, the translator's work is only the first step. Almost all my plays translated by a professional translator, have been proofread or translated back again by a native speaker. This has to be the second step. The best results are achieved when the native speaker and the proofreader are working together with the writer. Sometimes even this is not sufficient. Suppose you are lucky enough to have your play translated and proofread. It will then be read by native speakers who are professional actors, directors or playwrights. They are professionals and will always feel there is a need for polishing. Dramatic language is a very sensitive thing. There is always something missing. There is always the need for perfection.

Finally, you may have a perfect translation, but your play is only a drop in the ocean of plays written by your competitors from other countries. If you are not represented by an influential agent who is very successful in promoting international writers, it may very well happen that you wait for over a year only to receive the usual letter of refusal. The conclusion is, that your play has a long way to go to be read and respected in theatre communities abroad. Only the most energetic and lucky ones will achieve results. Those who write in more popular languages such as English, German and French do not take on extra expenses to get their plays translated, but they don't have to put any effort into it. The competition to get onto the world stages is tough for all of us, but writers who write in less established languages face a double challenge.

Although language is the primary problem, another one exists. As I have already mentioned, there is the difficulty with domestic agents or representatives of our works. Since our theatre community is very small, there are no theatre agents in Macedonia. We know each other quite well and our professional collaboration is based on regular personal contacts. But what about being represented abroad?! No Macedonian agency has the task to permanently push Macedonian plays abroad. Such an agency could also monitor interesting foreign plays, with a purpose to bring the most significant

ones to the Macedonian stages. Some occasional international exchanges take place, but they are all established through personal contacts, without any system or strategic cultural plan.

Macedonia is a member of the world network of the International Theatre Institute, a branch of UNESCO. In fact, the Macedonian Centre of the International Theatre Institute would be the appropriate institution to take on management tasks as a theatre agency for both domestic and foreign drama and to promote collaboration. However, this institution is still in its initial phases and is constantly faced with financial and other problems. The Macedonian Centre of the International Theatre Institute tries to promote our theatre and our playwrights. A couple of years ago the Institute attempted in publishing a successful play by a Macedonian writer in English. Their plan was to publish Macedonian plays in foreign languages at least once a year, and to dispatch them via the network of International Theatre Institutes. The idea was brilliant. But because of a lack of money, the Institute succeeded to publish one play only in more than three years. I happen to know that because of the translation they have taken this play to Turkey and that it is very likely that they will stage it there soon. Obviously this is the right way to have cultural promotion and collaboration. Festivals and tours by theatre companies are beneficial too. However, if you are touring with a play in which text is important, there is a big risk that your performance will not work with the foreign audience due to the linguistic barrier. Still, contacts made during these festivals and tours are valuable. Even if it's not for the project at hand, it could be important for future ones. Again, the risk is that if no big theatre or producer or director backs you, or if you have poor publicity, your tour might easily go by unnoticed. Usually everything depends on your ability to make personal contacts and establish some sort of connection with colleagues abroad. To my knowledge there are a few major festivals in Europe visited regularly by agents or publishers. Yet I am convinced that there are great works which don't have the luck to reach the biggest festivals.

Finally, as someone who has practical experience and who is often confronted with these problems, I would like to put forward some ideas that might help to develop multicultural collaboration among European and global theatre communities. I think it is necessary to set up a European Dramatists Sourcebook, to be issued every year. This Dramatists Sourcebook should include listings of all major European theatres and fringe groups, a calendar of European drama competitions, addresses of the summer theatre schools, of organisations, agents, fellowships and grants, workshops, translators, publishing opportunities and so on. As an example I point to the American Dramatists Sourcebook, published annually by The Theatre Communications Group in New York, and covering the whole territory of the US. This would be a practical and adequate solution for Europe too, and it could make a contribution to the opening up of European borders. Besides that, it could make a contribution towards global multicultural collaboration and exchange.

I would also like to suggest an edition of the "Best European Plays", to be published annually. Every year all European countries could submit their best national play, which would then be included in this "Best European Plays" anthology. The book should have a version in English, German and French, the three dominant languages. Of course each European country could have the book translated into its national language if it feels the need to do so and has the money to do it. That way we will have a systematic and lively picture of the best productions in Europe.

I put these ideas forward as practical solutions to help solve some problems connected with the diffusion of multiculturalism, which should eventually result in a Culture in Balance.

Netherlands

Beyond the bellybutton.

Dutch theatre 1969-1997

Rob Klinkenberg

Last week I spent a morning in the Central Museum in Utrecht, where an exhibition of the work of Wim T. Schippers is being held.

Schippers, an artist in the conceptual Fluxus-movement, started working in the sixties. He has made montage-like sculptures that look like a three-dimensional parody of Picasso and Braque. Yet he only became famous in the seventies, with television shows that were the epitome of hilarious bad taste. In them, a third rate opera singer in a dinner jacket, Sjef van Oekel, received guests. A typical episode would involve a dance with bare tits, silly songs, burping, farting, slanting cameras, jokes without a punch-line and poking fun at the Queen. In short, everything your parents were shocked about. This was 1973, don't forget.

Later, Wim T. Schippers made a theatre-production which even attracted the attention of the *New York Times*. *Going to the Dogs* was a regular family drama. The only thing special about it was that the 'actors' were German shepherd dogs.

What I'm trying to point out is that Dutch culture has undergone a sea-change in the sixties and seventies - though not quite to the extent my last example would suggest. Schippers is a typical example of the antitraditional, zany, modernistic trend in our culture.

Revolution à la Fluxus did not limit itself to the fine arts. The theatre too underwent a massive change in the late sixties, sparked off by the so-called 'Tomato Revolt' (1969).

Until then, basically there were seven or eight big companies that played a classical repertoire in big prosceniumarch theatres, without racking their brains too much about style or content. Their productions reflected the taste and background of their faithful middle class audience. Then, suddenly, influenced by left-wing political theories and disgust for the boring postwar stuffiness, students started disrupting performances by throwing tomatoes at the actors. They demanded discussion about the relevance of the companies' work. It all tied in neatly of course with the general desire by the younger generation in Western Europe to change society.

If society didn't change all that much, Dutch theatre did.

A host of new, often small, companies sprang up. Some of them were politically orientated. Others broke with the traditional style of acting and started experimenting with form. The highly influential and brilliant *Werkteater* was an example of both. This collective of actors used improvisation to create their own 'plays' about social issues, such as disease, old people, or homosexuality. Their work was recognizable, moving and often funny. An interesting aspect of the *Werkteater* was that it contained several young actors who had worked within the traditional companies before the Tomato Revolt. Many other actors, often older, were not so flexible. This caused a division within Dutch theatre that did not close until well into the eighties.

Together with the new companies, new theatre buildings opened. Instead of big prosceniumarch theatres, the new groups preferred smaller venues, typically housing an audience of a hundred to two hundred. These didn't have raised stages; instead the auditorium was raked. One of these theatres was the Mickery in Amsterdam. The Mickery was not home to a Dutch company, but provided a venue for experimental groups from the USA and Great Britain mainly. It influenced the taste and insights of young directors and writers immensely.

It must be said that the Dutch government reacted with admirable prowess to the new situation. It started to subsidize the new groups, thus preparing the ground for a fantastic outburst of energy, creativity and renewal of our theatre.

An important company was Onafhankelijk Toneel - "Independent Theatre". The name says it all. This collective (the thing to be in those days) of very young actors was typically one of the companies that experimented with style. The genius among their ranks was Jan Joris Lamers. He thoroughly renewed the theatre by removing the element of make-believe. Illusion and its workings, whether the actor is just a character or himself, or a bit of both, became questions for theatrical debate. Here was a kind of theatre not only about the play and its illusory world, but also about the theatre itself and the tangible world of the men and women acting and the audience watching.

Another influential company was Baal (director Leonard Frank), who created many productions that used music in combination with text.

But what kind of plays did these companies perform?

The Werkteater created their own stuff. Others, like Baal and Onafhankelijk Toneel, often performed the classical repertoire, albeit in a totally new way. The classics were mixed with new plays from abroad. Playwrights like Peter Handke, Thomas Bernhard and Slawomir Mrozek were added to the repertoire.

In Amsterdam, a company called Centrum started a policy of putting on new plays by Dutch literary authors. Although interesting at the time, it soon turned out to be a red herring.

The true renewal of playwriting in the Netherlands was going to come from the theatre artists themselves. I suppose that's nothing new in the history of the theatre. Wherever the theatre changed drastically, (e.g. Elizabethan England, France in the mid-seventeenth century, Russia at the turn of the century) authors followed, usually from within theatrical circles. This applied to Holland too.

It is interesting in this respect that Holland, unlike most countries, has no tradition of playwriting. In the seventeenth century the verse dramas of Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) and lively comedies of Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Brederode (1585-1618) were very successful. However, for reasons the experts still write long articles about, in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, dramatic writing petered out. It wasn't until the early years of this century, when Herman Heijermans (1864-1926) wrote his social-realistic dramas, that a great new playwright could be hailed.

However, up to the renewal of the seventies, the Dutch theatre companies usually imported their plays from abroad, often from Britain, France or Germany.

With the shake-up, things started to change. Centrum tried the literary approach by asking novelists to write for them. It was a forced attempt at creating a new dramaturgy, although one nonliterary writer did emerge who has stuck around ever since: Ton Vorstenbosch. He writes in the well-made style, rather atypical of the Dutch theatre.

More important were the arrivals on the scene of Frans Strijards, Gerardjan Rijnders and Judith Herzberg.

Strijards (b. 1952) started his company Projekttheater in 1974. Operating under the name Cees Cromwijk, Strijards wrote his own plays. They were a sort of supercharged Neo-Pirandellian tragicomedies, often about the theatre and its conventions. In the mid-eighties Projekttheater ceased to exist, and Strijards started a new group, Artikelen en Projekten.

It was for this group that he wrote his best plays, notably *Hensbergen* (1986), *Gesprekken over Goethe?* (1988, translated into German as *Gespräche über G.*) and *Het syndroom van Stendhal* (*The Stendhal Syndrome*, 1989).

Hensbergen is a family drama mixed with a drama about how to make theatre. A family of actors (father, mother and son) and an outsider, a lover of the theatre, arrive in a theatre haunted by the souls of Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw. Father Hensbergen, named after a well-known old-fashioned actor, quarrels with his son about 'new forms'.

In *Gesprekken over Goethe?* the actors are typically named Actor I, II, and III. Together they set up a frenzied cabaret act built up of memories leaping to and fro in time. The play has a serious note however: two of the actors turn out to be psychiatrists who try to make the third one relive a suicide.

Het syndroom van Stendhal is situated in the world of well to do would-be art lovers. One of them has died, and the circumstances are suspicious. A naive detective is hired to investigate. His enquiry leads to nothing, even to another death.

Many of Strijard's plays use clichéd plots, such as a detective story. On top of these solid structures his characters flounder: noisy, desperate and searching for the truth. Of course there is no truth in the theatre, Strijards seems to say. Pretending is the essence of it.

Gerardjan Rijnders (b. 1949) is a prolific figure. He directs, acts, makes (TV)-films and writes much of his own material. By its very nature it is tailored to the specific needs of Rijnders's productions. The playwright Rijnders arrived on the scene in 1976, with *Schreber*, in collaboration with Mia Meijer. (The latter was a talented playwright in her own right, who died tragically in 1993). The play was about the well-known case of the German judge Schreber as described by Freud. Schreber thought he was a woman so that he could be God's bride, and was treated in a mental hospital.

Rijnders has written about thirty texts for the theatre up to now. We can roughly divide them into three categories: the so-called 'holidaycomedies' (written during his holidays), the 'montage'texts and the relationship dramas.

The holiday comedies sport a high degree of Wim T. Schippers-like corny humour (e.g. *The Rhinestone Queen*, 1978). The montage texts have provided material for some overwhelming productions, such as *Wolfson, de Talenstudent* (1985) and *Titus, geen Shakespeare* (1988). However, because they were written with a specific production in mind, it's unlikely others will find a way to stage them.

This is probably not the case with the relationship dramas and other chamber plays. *Silicone* (1986), *Pick-up* (1987, in English *Black Hole*), *Tulpen Vulpen* (1988, German *Schnickschnack*), and recently *Kanker* (1996, *Cancer*) have all been translated into English and German. These dramas are almost plotless. They are about people, usually a man and a woman, sitting and trying to get to the bone of their existence. There is a touch of Strindberg there, and an element of Sartre, but Rijnders is even

more cynical and much more funny. These plays touch on the limits of what is possible in the theatre. They are totally inexplicit and consist of no more than stories to keep the pain away.

Recent plays, such as *Mooi* (1994, *Beautiful*) and *Echt* (1997, *Real* - still to be performed) add a more philosophical dimension to the human struggle. *Liefhebber* (1992, English: *Buff*; German: *Luft*) finally deserves a special mention. This vitriolic monologue by a disillusioned theatre critic has been translated into five languages, including Spanish and Italian. While the critic moans about the lack of skill and excitement on stage, he fails to see the drama of his wife and son, who die without him even noticing. *Liefhebber* is a disturbing play about human shortsightedness.

Judith Herzberg (b. 1934) is best known as a poet. She recently received the highest State literary award for her collected poetry. However, during the early seventies Herzberg followed a workshop to learn the skills of playwriting, developing her work in collaboration with the actors. Her play *Leedvermaak* (1982, *Lea's Wedding*) is a landmark in Dutch theatre. Like many of her plays, it is built up out of many short scenes. The action takes place at the wedding of Lea and Nico, but we never see the wedding as such. In side rooms their parents, Lea's wartime foster mother, a former husband and many other guests slowly unfold the background story to us. Because the memories of the war keep rearing their head within the Jewish family, the party never becomes really festive. Remembering the prewar days, one of the guests says "Living is something they used to do."

The great power of Herzberg lies in her ability to let small events take on tremendous meaning. Her language is deceptively simple. At first glance people seem to say quite ordinary things, but behind them painful experiences are hidden. In many of her plays, such as *En/Of* (1985, *And/Or*) and *Kras* (1988, *Scratch*; German title *Tohuwabohu*) these suppressed events are personified by a mysterious person snooping around the house.

Recently Herzberg wrote a sequel to *Leedvermaak*, extending the theme of 'second generation' Jewish survivors to the youngest, third generation. (*Rijgdraad*, 1995).

In introducing these three playwrights, I have stressed their strong links with the changing theatre of the Netherlands in the past thirty years. Strijards and Rijnders wrote for their own companies, Herzberg is closely connected to Baal and to Jan Joris Lamers's new company 'Discordia', a follow-up to *Onafhankelijk Toneel*. Other writers too are closely connected with the practice of the theatre - nobody more so than Rob de Graaf.

De Graaf (b. 1952) has written all the material for a small group called 'Nieuw West', after the postwar housing estate in West Amsterdam where they grew up. De Graaf develops his plays during rehearsal and writes them straight into his actors' veins. With him, the distinction between the actor as a person and as a character disappears. The roles are indicated by the first names of the actors. Sometimes 'Nieuw West' organized performances where they got themselves drunk and then proceeded to say and do precisely what they felt like at the moment.

De Graaf's texts are coiled like a snake, full of circular reasoning and brooding emotions. Violence, religious mysticism, loneliness and *The Boy* are recurring themes. However, he treats them with strong irony which makes them both moving and palatable. His best works are *Rinus* (1987, about the young Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe whom the Nazi's blamed for the Reichstag fire in 1933), *Pygmalion* (1989; two depraved gents try to corrupt innocence in the shape of a young but wilful boy) and *A Hard Day's Night* (1991) about the loneliness of a skinhead. Recently De Graaf

teamed up with the young company 'Dood Paard'. *2Skin*, a play mindful of Duras in its circular handling of memories, has received an award.

Karst Woudstra (b. 1947) is a director and a writer who is not attached to a particular company. His plays are more traditional in their form, often set among the young and mobile upper class. Like a classical Freudian analyst, Woudstra reveals their lusts and anxieties in a style which reminds one of Lars Norén, with whom Woudstra is acquainted.

Many of Woudstra's plays have been translated into German. The best known of them is the award winning *Een zwarte Pool* (1992, German: *Ein schwarzer Pole*). Two well-to-do young couples have dinner together. Husband A turns out to have had relationships with everyone, including Husband B, to whom he has 'bequeathed' his old girlfriend. Catalyst in the events is the 'black Pole', a Polish student who does jobs and is paid 'black'.

Well known and much loved in Holland, also because of his films, is Alex van Warmerdam (b. 1952). His witty plays, written for his company 'De Mexicaanse Hond', merge theatre and pop-music and are sometimes underestimated by the theatre intelligentsia.

At first no more than absurd (*De Wet van Luisman, Graniet*), his works have developed into terse dramas about 'ordinary people', who, at a second glance, are full of passions trying to escape. Accordingly, they behave very strangely. This is the case in his latest play, *Kleine Teun*, about a brother and a sister in the countryside who desperately want to have a baby. So they arrange for the young woman who teaches Teun to write to have the baby. It ends in misery.

Just like Flemish drama (see Erwin Jans's article), with whom we share the same language, Dutch drama has suddenly taken off in the past twenty, thirty years. Holland took the lead, but Flanders overtook us in the mid-eighties with the so-called Flemish Wave. Where at first a deficiency existed, there is now a strong body of plays suited to the need of a particular kind of theatre. It is a theatre that asks questions about our fragmented life in a highly industrialized nation at the end of the 20th century. It is mocking and full of relativity, in line with what some would call a national character. It does not cherish tradition, like in most other countries, and sometimes it lacks a sense of tradition. From the audience's point of view, the development of the theatre in the Netherlands has not always been a success story. Especially in the seventies and eighties there were complaints about the theatre being fragmented and too busy staring at its own bellybutton. This led to a drop in attendance which has only picked up again in recent years. The complaints by the audience were only partly justified. Much of their confusion sprouted from the unfamiliarity of theatremanagers (I mean the people who run the houses - in Holland the theatres are often not run by the companies themselves) with the new developments. This meant that quite a few of them surrounded the renewal with an air of 'unintelligible experiments.' Although this was right in some cases, their lack of knowledge and enthusiasm sometimes amounted to downright defiance.

In this summary, I have not done justice to authors such as Marin van Veldhuizen (b. 1948), with her witty brand of feminism, Koos Terpstra (b. 1955) with his tense *Troje-trilogie*, or director/author Lodewijk de Boer whose *Buddha of Ceylon* has earned praise. Nor have I mentioned the youngest generation, exemplified by Jeroen van den Berg (b.1966), Peer Wittenbols (b. 1965) and Oscar van Woensel (b. 1970). They are clever with words and use this ability to show that people will say just about everything these days, without meaning a word.

I have also failed to mention a highly successful group of writers for the children's theatre. Ad de Bont, Pauline Mol, Suzanne van Lohuizen, Roel Adam and Heleen Verburg for example, have written plays for children that reflect the achievements in the 'big' theatre. Their success outshines that of the 'adult' writers, since their plays are performed regularly in Germany and elsewhere. Suzanne van Lohuizen's *Have you seen my little boy* for example, is presently on the repertoire of several German children's groups.

Finally, from the above it will be clear that plays in Dutch make up an important share of what is on offer at our theatres. I don't have the exact figures, but I estimate that about half the repertoire of the bigger theatres - both with and without a proscenium arch - consists of original work in Dutch. Only thirty years ago, this would have been less than ten percent.

Quite a few of these plays have been translated, especially into German. This applies first of all to work that is not specific to a particular kind of performance, e.g. Woudstra and Herzberg. However, although they have been translated, many of them haven't been performed and there have not been any smash hits. Maybe many Dutch plays are a bit too much out of line with the taste of the general European public.

Many of the plays have been introduced abroad by translators or dramaturges who work or live abroad. Apart from these casual contacts, there are two institutions that try to get Dutch plays produced abroad. They can help you if you want to read or produce any of the plays mentioned above.

For reading purposes, there is a series of Dutch plays in English and French published by International Theatre & Film Books, Kleine-Gartmanplantsoen 21/VII, 1017 RP Amsterdam; tel. +31.20.6255877. This series is subsidized by the Dutch ministry of culture and comprises titles by Herzberg and Rijnders.

Then there is the Theater Instituut Nederland (Theatre Institute of the Netherlands), who promote the translations of Dutch plays elsewhere. They have fact sheets on various authors that include sample scenes. They also have a fund to get plays translated and assist in getting them published in, mainly, English, French and German. The Theater Instituut Nederland has published some anthologies of these plays in cooperation with other publishers. It can also put you in touch with various theatre companies and their authors directly.

Norway

Current situation and contemporary drama in Norway

Kristian Seltun

assisted by *Sven Birkeland*

A look into the 1996 Norwegian Catalogue of Dramatists will give a list of 120 names representing an enormous diversity of background, career and ways of expression. To define a general tendency in this vast array of names is impossible of course. It wouldn't be right either, because despite its length, many writers who create texts for the theatre are not represented in the catalogue. Instead, what the following presentation of the current situation in Norway will try to do, is to map out the most important initiatives that have been made in relation to the development of contemporary drama. At this point we must make a reservation: what one considers being contemporary will vary with one's opinions about the development of the theatre. If the word is not to be taken simply as a synonym for 'current', a somewhat subjective point of view cannot be avoided. Therefore the last part of the presentation will give a more detailed description of the Norsk Dramatikk-Prosjektet (Norwegian Dramatic Arts Project) initiated by Bergen Internasjonale Teater (Bergen International Theatre). It will also describe how the continuation of this initiative fares today.

Brief history

It might appear that Norwegian drama has stagnated since its heyday, which centres around the life and work of Henrik Ibsen and the couple of decades following his death. This period is known as the golden age in the heritage of our theatre. One can very well argue, as many have done, that modernism never really found an entry into this landscape. The psychological-realistic mode of expression still dominates in the most important theatres and the texts generally follow a linear structure. Despite this, it is possible to trace an undertone, however faint, of theatre artists and dramatists who have tried to come up with an alternative.

An early example is the well known novelist Knut Hamsun, who wrote plays of a symbolist character, but who did not feel accepted as a dramatist. This was due mainly to the looming shadow of Ibsen. Another example is Nordahl Grieg who, in the 1930's worked out political dramas with a stationary dramaturgical structure. His play *Nederlaget* (*The Defeat*, 1937), is said to have influenced Brecht when he wrote his play about the Paris commune. Closer to our own time, Cecilie Løveid is one of the most important dramatists. She can be considered as a forerunner of new dramaturgical tendencies and new ways of organizing the process of writing. This is obvious from productions like *Balansedame* (*Balancing Lady*) presented at Den Nationale Scene in 1985. In it, an installation-like scenography embraced fragmented monologues, recalling works by writers like Botho Strauss and Heiner Müller. In another project, *Badehuset* (*The Bathhouse*), 1989, Løveid worked with the experimental theatre group Verdensteatret (*The World Theatre*), creating a text-landscape in outdoor Oslo surroundings. It drew heavily on performance art aesthetics. This collaboration anticipated a tendency where the dramatist sees himself as a theatrical artist, taking part in the theatrical process

on a par with the other contributors. According to Knut Ove Arntzen, theatre scholar at the University of Bergen, this was indirectly made possible because directors started positioning themselves as *auteur*. This tendency saw its real breakthrough in the visual dramaturgy of the eighties. This created complete freedom in relation to written material, and the dramatist in the traditional sense started to lose ground. At the same time, this tendency enabled a new kind of thinking in dramatic writing, which has allowed the dramatist to work in the theatre according to these new basics. According to Arntzen, this was the starting point for a new role for the dramatist as someone who works independently. The best example of a Norwegian writer who undertook such a role as the foundation of his writing for theatre, is Finn Iunker. His text *The Answering Machine*, originally written in English when Iunker participated at the Dasarts school in Amsterdam in 1994, shows this very clearly. The text makes no structural claims for dramaturgical solutions or general arrangements, but with the subtitle 'A Text for a Theatre' it very clearly calls for a performance.

Another extension of the function of the director towards being an *auteur* should be mentioned in relation to dramatic writing. The theatre group Bak-Truppen continued this tendency with projects such as *Per, you are lying yes* (1993). It was a merry paraphrase of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* giving Per different functions as they toured around Europe. In Frankfurt he performed in an erotic educational show, in Bergen he sold second-hand cars etc.

Current situation

In addition to various courses in playwriting, given for example at the Writing Academies in Bø and Bergen, over the last ten years four main initiatives have focussed on the development of contemporary Norwegian drama. Perhaps the most visible is the Norwegian Drama Festival, a competition for writers which has been held four times since 1986. The goal of the festival, according to their programme, is the recruitment of new poetic talent to the theatre.

Every festival has on average resulted in 85 manuscripts. More than half of these were by new writers who made their *début* in the competition. While some ten to thirteen texts are performed at the festival, other texts move on in different directions; for example to the institutionalized theatres, to a publishing house or to a television production. According to the artistic director, Siri Senje, one can distinguish four major tendencies in the 1996 competition. First there is a tendency towards social commitment, where the text is turned into a medium to put forward important themes. Secondly, there is a tendency towards introspection, where the author wants to travel through various moods and spiritual processes. Thirdly there is a tendency to focus psychologically on the inner circles of family life, with love relations as a point of departure. The Swedish playwright Lars Norén is one of the main sources of inspiration for this group. Finally the fourth tendency as described by Siri Senje is the existential one. It places its characters in basic, existential situations.

Another long-running initiative has been the so-called Bergen-project 1986-1996. Dramaturg Tom Remlov, who was artistic director at Den Nationale Scene (The National Theatre of Bergen) in this period, was responsible for it. Right from the beginning, Remlov started to encourage established authors to write for the stage, in the belief that the poet is the strongest power in pressing the theatre towards a unique language for its own time. Remlov also emphasised the potential of the theatre as one of the last places where you can see various issues being dealt with at close

quarters. The theatre is a very intimate meeting place. In the end Remlov's efforts have resulted in around 60 premieres of new Norwegian dramas in which the written word and a textual conflict take a central place. One of the most remarkable collaborations to come out of the project, was that between director Kai Johnsen and writer Jon Fosse, the latter now generally recognized as the leading dramatist in the country. Together with Cecilie Løveid, Fosse has managed to break into the institutionalized theatres. His dramas have a rare combination of solid craft and a modern minimalist attitude, reminiscent of Beckett's tacit atmosphere. Løveid's latest production at Den Nationale Scene is *Rhindøtrene* (*The Daughters of the Rhine*, 1996), a text which circles around the German medieval mystic Hildegard von Bingen's ambitions to place an eyesick girl in a mystery play. The play was also presented in collaboration with Kai Johnsen. Most of Løveid's texts have been translated into German and English. Some of Fosse's pieces have been translated into German and French, such as *Namnet* (*The Name*), 1995, while *Nokon kjem til åkome* (*Someone Will Come*), 1996, is also available in Hungarian.

As a third initiative should be mentioned Det Åpne Teater (The Open Theatre), a small foundation situated in Oslo "not as an alternative, but as a supplement to the institutionalized theatres". Ever since it was established by Anne-May Nilsen in 1983, its intention has been the encouragement of new Norwegian drama. It has tried to achieve this through inviting writers, both amateurs and professionals, to read the play together with professional actors. The next step is to bring the material into a workshop situation. There, a director joins it and finally the play ends as a workshop production. A selected audience and newspaper-critics are invited. The main goal of the process is to rework the manuscripts so that they are easier to sell. For this reason dramaturgs and directors from the institutionalized theatres are invited to take part. A quick survey of the 1996 annual report shows a considerable number of productions and a high level of activity at Det Åpne Teater. Last year they also carried out a cultural exchange project with The National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Connecticut, USA.

The three initiatives presented above, concern themselves mostly with conventional drama. In doing so, they affirm the lukewarm conditions in which drama is considered both a literary genre and a modern development in the theatrical arts.

The fourth initiative however, stands out as a solitary attempt to create a viable alternative. It is the Norwegian Dramatic Arts Project (NDAP), started at Bergen International Theatre in 1992. With support from the Norwegian Arts Council, the project developed from focussing on small scale new texts, into a major theatre event. It produced several theatrical productions based on texts during the 1992 - 95 period. The overall goal of the project was to establish a platform where new forms of theatre can meet with the need for new texts. They wanted to limit the distance between writing a text and actually putting it on stage. Therefore, the writers were invited to the project as practitioners of theatre. Fine artists, musicians, film and video makers etc. were also invited to join the process. Several concrete productions resulted out of this artistic collaboration, and genres such as music theatre, cabaret, multimedia, performance art and installations were a natural part of the NDAP, along with the textually based performances. This diversity lent strength to the project. The large audience interest confirmed this. Work with new texts recaptured its former position. One of the performances in NDAP, *The Answering Machine* (based on the text by Finn Iunker), was a coproduction with Flemish actors' company 'Stan'. The performance toured internationally and made

the project known outside Norway too. Later this text was translated into Dutch, French and Norwegian.

As a continuation of NDAP, last September Bergen International Theatre invited playwrights, directors, researchers, theatre workers and the public to an intimate conference. Its goal was to try to open up and promote discussion on contemporary dramatic writing. The conference, named *Theatretextcontext*, focussed primarily on texts for the theatre and their use in contemporary theatre. In a reference to the lukewarm situation its subtitle was: "Norwegian Drama - 14 degrees Celsius and no wind". Together with the conference there was a small festival in which different ways of dealing with text on stage were presented. This ranged from stripped-down classics (*Hamlet*, *Godot*) in a post-camp setting to a lyrical text presented (mostly) on tape in a music installation.

Theatretextcontext '97 (September 19th to 21st) will address the practical situation of producing contemporary texts for the stage. It will try to establish a basis for further investigation into what a contemporary dramatic text could - or should - be, and how these texts are used on stage, read and understood. It will also focus on European exchange programmes, the exportation of texts, their translation, the role of the dramatist and the need for new theory. In addition to a conference it will include theatre productions, readings, open debates and a workshop in cooperation with Canadian theatre workers (text by Canadian Death Waits).

"I don't know if we need dramatists or anybody writing for the theatre at all", Finn lunker said in an interview some time ago, "but if we still wish to see drama as a genre, it is important to allow a certain openness". And perhaps the direction where drama ought to go is precisely towards greater openness. Whereas other literary genres apparently get their vitality from an ongoing formal development, drama often seems to fall behind by sticking to the old structure of dialogue. Only the themes which are discussed seem to change. If we want to change this, we must also seriously take into consideration what happens in the pure development in theatrical arts. Thus we can find new ways for texts to develop and also new possibilities to allow texts to cross borders, linguistic ones as well as aesthetic ones.

Portugal

Culture in Balance: Portuguese drama in perspective*Maria Helena Serôdio*

1.

It is not very common in Portugal to discuss publicly some of the more complex issues related to the theatre.

However, in June 1994, a conference on Theatre Repertoire took place in Lisbon, organised by Culturgest (a cultural foundation of the most important Portuguese bank, Caixa Geral de Depósitos, a non private organization). For various reasons, it did not attract many people, though some theatre directors, actors, critics and journalists (from Portugal and abroad) took part in it, contributing some interesting ideas to the discussion.

Three levels of inquiry were distinguished in the argument about a repertoire:

1. the financial, political, social and cultural condition of theatre groups (allowing them to make a real choice);
2. the area of marketable texts and the theatrical production (how are texts made known to theatre professionals?);
3. the playwriting itself (how can plays be written, read and evaluated?).

The second and the third levels are the ones that interest us most right now. They lead us to question how new texts are made known to directors and how they are inserted in a planned repertoire.

Travelling abroad to attend certain theatres (in New York, Paris, Berlin or London), going to important festivals, hearing about a great success somewhere, reading about awards given for plays, are the most common channels for obtaining knowledge about foreign new plays. But, obviously, the importance of a playwright who has already been staged in Portugal may attract attention to all his other plays, both old and new.

Probably with one single exception (Heiner Müller, whose *Der Auftrag* was published in 1982¹ and was first produced in Lisbon by 'A Cornucópia' in 1986), the publication of a foreign play in Portuguese generally follows the performance, if it is published at all. For various reasons, publishers lag well behind theatre people when it comes to discovering new talents or plays, and the percentage of published translations is rather small.

As for languages, recent foreign plays in translation are mainly from the most common languages in Europe: English, French and German. However, we see some plays being translated from Italian and Spanish. Very, very rarely other languages are dealt with: for instance, only in April 1997 was Lars Norén first shown in Portugal, by 'A Cornucópia'.

As I mentioned before, these translations will rarely find a publisher in Portugal, even if the production is a success. However, once in a while the companies themselves provide the translation in an inexpensive edition. When it is sold at the entrance to the theatre, it is likely to find more interested buyers.

As far as I know, theatre professionals are not approached by publishers or writer's managers to consider new texts. But other channels may be used. I recall a conference held in Lisbon by the International Association of Theatre Critics in November 1994, where each critic brought a short note on interesting new plays and authors from his or her own country. In the audience were some important Portuguese directors and actors, and I can assure you that at least two major hits resulted directly from that conference: Werner Schwab's *The Presidents* and Kevin Elyot's *My Night with Gus*. But again, the source languages were English and German, although critics from countries with lesser known languages did speak well of other playwrights and plays. Unfortunately, nobody took the trouble to learn about them.

When considering new Portuguese plays, things are substantially different:

They have never been staged before and there is no possible way of comparing results. Now what is interesting is, that if we check the list of plays published each year, the score is around ten (generally it hardly comes to that many), but only one or two of those have been produced in the theatre.

On the other hand, some new plays find their way to the stage each year, but it is not certain that they will find a publisher. Usually they are written by a friend of the company, either on his or her own initiative or in response to a specific theme put forward by the company (a social problem, for instance).

There is, however, a further problem: supposing the theatre company publishes the play in an inexpensive edition, how will it go on sale in a bookshop when the production is no longer running? Distribution is probably one of the most difficult areas to deal with in this field. I can give you an example of this: the Portuguese Authors' Society has been publishing some plays over the past twenty-five years. They issue three or four titles each year, but these remain unknown in the market, and few are sold or read. This may have been one of the reasons why over the past two or three years the Society has been co-publishing its books with an important publisher. I am sure this has been a relief for the Society and its authors...

As far as statistics on Portuguese plays in repertoire go, they show that of the about 150 new productions in 1996, about twenty used a classical Portuguese text. Of these, 60% were by Gil Vicente (c. 1460 - c. 1539). These plays were performed either separately or dramaturgically reworked to combine different plays and characters.

Around sixteen other productions were based on contemporary Portuguese authors, although some of them were not real playwrights, but poets or novelists whose texts were collected and dramatized for the purpose. This shows that around 76% per cent of theatrical performances in Portugal are based on foreign texts, either classical, or contemporary. And although I quote from only one year, I may assure you that all the other years were not very different.

2.

Publishers complain that plays don't sell well. One reason may be that theatre companies are not particularly keen on staging Portuguese contemporary drama. Perhaps also modern theatre is not yet generally considered dignified enough for school syllabi or academic research.

Most companies complain that audiences drop off when the play is by a contemporary Portuguese writer. But even if this is true, I still think that some of the most interesting and challenging productions come from Portuguese texts (both classical and recent).

In a way, I think some of them have been not only excellent artistic events but also unique ones, although perhaps for the wrong reasons. I say 'wrong reasons' because those plays have not had the opportunity of being produced by foreigners, and consequently we can't compare artistic results. When considering the most recent Portuguese plays to have found a publisher and/or a stage, several questions arise:

1. who write these plays?
2. what kind of themes do they address?
3. how far have they gone to meet some of the most recent formal, technical and aesthetic languages used in the theatre nowadays?

2.1. Playwrights

Some authors writing for the theatre have done other kinds of writing - novels, poetry or journalism - and their relationship with the stage remains mostly a second choice.

This is the case with novelists such as José Saramago, Mário de Carvalho, Mário Cláudio, Agustina Bessa Luís, Luisa Costa Gomes, Yvette K. Centeno, Fernando Dacosta or Carlos Porto. Yet, I am not dismissing their importance in the theatre. Indeed Yvette K. Centeno's recent *The Three Love Lemons*² is an interesting example of reworking folk material for young people's theatre. Carlos Porto, a distinguished theatre critic, managed to write a very curious novel³. It consists of a collection of (imaginary) pieces of criticism, while simultaneously featuring a passionate love affair between the protagonist (a misanthropic critic) and an actress. One of its chapters was successfully adapted for the stage. I shall return later to the other novelists I just mentioned.

In poetry, excepting José Régio and Jorge de Sena (both deceased), women have lately been predominant. I am thinking of Natália Correia, Fiamma Hasse Pais Brandão and Teresa Rita Lopes. *The Drab*⁴, written by Natália Correia in 1967 (but banned by censorship authorities) was finally produced and published in the eighties. It is a powerful work, touched by a certain baroque splendour, both in its poetical and scenic design. It tells the story of a fake miracle involving two small shepherds and a prostitute, and the way the event was politically and economically exploited afterwards.

However, there have been cases where writing for the stage has been the author's only concern. This was the case with Bernardo Santareno (by far the most important playwright of the fifties and the sixties), Romeu Correia, Norberto Ávila (whose plays have already been produced abroad), Vicente Sanches (whose grotesque and bizarre comedies have reached their peak with *The Dead Man's Whim*⁵), Jaime Salazar Sampaio (related to the absurd theatre), Prista Monteiro, Jaime Gralheiro or Augusto Sobral (a sensitive writer of fine characters in unexpected situations⁶). Although they are all well acquainted with the way theatre works, they have been mainly literary writers.

Lately, however, a new generation has emerged from within the theatre: people who have been dramaturgs (working on a regular basis for a theatre company), directors and even actors. They have predecessors of course: we can recall from the fifties and sixties people like António Pedro, Luzia Martins or Costa Ferreira, who were both directors and playwrights. But the connection between drama and the aesthetics of a theatre company is perhaps more visible now. This is the case with Helder Costa, Abel Neves, and more recently, Jorge Silva Melo, Eduarda Dionísio and Carlos Pessoa. I will return to the last three later.

2.2. Themes

Luciana Steggano Picchio ⁷, writing about Portuguese theatre some thirty years ago, mentioned two main reasons for the lack of a good Portuguese repertoire. The first one was censorship, which was strict and severe in those days, and caused writers not only to be silent about important issues but also to write in a devious and complicated language. The second reason was the thematic obsession with a nostalgia for a heroic past.

It is true that history has been an obsession, though we can read different concerns and different purposes in this trend. The ideological "establishment" of the fascist regime insisted on these matters as a way to emphasize the idea of a superior patriotic destiny. Yet occasionally we would find texts that used historical events not to glorify, but rather to criticize political ideas. This was the case with José Cardoso Pires in his play *The surrender of heroes* (1961), Luís Stau Monteiro with *Abraham Zacut's Hands* (1968), and Bernardo Santareno with *The Jew* (1966).

After the late sixties, the Brechtian way of handling history was combined with this romantic idea of composing chronicles of victory and defeat. In this way, history kept on being a good subject, perhaps the most cherished one when writing about Portugal and the Portuguese. I guess it has always been common to select a specific national issue, even if now it would no longer be used to glorify the country's heroes.

The list of playwrights using historical events or characters is therefore long, although their concerns and purposes may be very different. José Cardoso Pires, Miguel Franco, Miguel Rovisco, José Jorge Letria, Virgílio Martinho, José Saramago, António Borges Coelho and Helder Costa illustrate the different styles and the distinct ways of looking at history and writing about it. But except Helder Costa, who is himself a director and was keen on indulging in the grotesque and caricature, all the others have tended to develop a traditional way of playwriting.

However, I would like to stress that they don't generally write about recent history. This applies particularly to the colonial war waged by the regime deposed in 1974 against the independence movements in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. That is why I bring to your attention three plays about this subject: *A second-hand Jeep* (1987) by Fernando Dacosta, *The sense of epopée* ⁸ (1989), by Mário de Carvalho, and *Solarium* ⁹ (1992) by Fernando Augusto. Interestingly, the three were published and produced, and favourably received by audience and critics. They all, however, focus on the present situation of young men, back in the continent, where their painful and traumatic war experience is remembered and made responsible for irrational or desperate attitudes.

The forties were dramatized by Luiz Francisco Rebello in *Portugal: the '40s*, combining different dramatic and theatrical traditions to compose an interesting fresco. Documentary theatre, Brechtian devices, revue theatre and cabaret are the main ingredients of a broad canvas on the period.

Three other plays about recent Portuguese history should not go unnoticed: *Salazar: God, Homeland and Maria* by Maria do Céu Ricardo (unpublished, but produced in December 1995), *The Girl from Warsaw* by Mário de Carvalho, and *The Night* (1979) by José Saramago.

The former is a first play by the author; it is an interesting monologue delivered by the dictator's housekeeper while she is working in the kitchen. She is lost in contradictory feelings of appraisal and resentment towards Salazar. The action takes place the day after the presidential election on 9 June 1958, when General Humberto Delgado, an opposition candidate, for a time became a threat to the regime. Maria wonders what would it be like if he were to win the election and keep his word of

dismissing the prime minister. It is a captivating attempt to not only evoke two historical characters in their everyday behaviour (much of the *petite histoire* was said in a low voice), but also as a collection of ideological *topoi* which characterized the dominant values of those days.

*The Girl from Warsaw*¹⁰ focuses on the generation gap between an old communist and his three grown-up children, who dismiss their father's ideals. It is a realistic and moving testimony, though it sometimes bogs down in theatrical conventions, which tend to build a too closed and inevitable ending. It does, however, touch on some important issues that have lately left a mark on Portuguese society. This is mainly with respect to an ideological shift from the triumphant left-wing movement that came about with the Revolution to a more conservative view on life and society which tends to dominate the new discourse in politics and the media.

*The Night*¹¹ by José Saramago evokes the night of the Revolution - 25 April 1974 - in the editorial room of a newspaper. It's a good and realistic piece of work made by someone who knew only too well how things worked in the press, both on a human and on a political level. He also showed what it could lead to during a time of political upheaval. As some of you may know, José Saramago was a distinguished journalist before embracing writing novels full time¹².

It is, however, in breaking with these traditional ways of playwriting that some plays have lately displayed a new elan. I will point out three trends, although I am aware that they may not correspond to a general pattern. Indeed, it's no more than a convenient way of bringing together another four or five texts I would like you to know about.

2.3. New compositions

One of the most interesting challenges to conventions in the theatre has been to write about everyday life (but avoiding naturalism). In this respect I want to highlight three recent plays: *Never, nothing from nobody*¹³ (1991) by Luísa Costa Gomes, and two others written by Jorge Silva Melo: *Antonio, A Boy from Lisbon*¹⁴ (1995) and *The End, or Have mercy on us* (produced in 1996, but still unpublished).

A second trend is of a poetical and philosophical nature. In this trend I want to stress the importance of plays such as *Before the Night Comes*¹⁵ (1992) by Eduarda Dionísio, and *Prometheus* (1997) by Jorge Silva Melo, the play which has undergone several versions, until a final one will be reached next May.

A third attempt has been made by Carlos Pessoa, who has been regularly doing his own plays with his company, Teatro da Garagem. His way of writing has a lot to do with improvisation, and some of the results smack of a postmodernist style, as is the case with *Our village* (1995). A simple reading of the play leaves much to guess despite its interesting theatrical effect, yet it was staged as a curious artefact.

Eduarda Dionísio's play *Before the Night Comes* is a splendid collection of poetical monologues delivered by four important tragic characters: Juliet, Antigone, Inês de Castro and Medea. These protagonists represent four women of different eras who suffer their tragic fortune because they live in a world where men dictate unjust and cruel laws.

Never, nothing from Nobody by Luísa Costa Gomes is an ingenious play that focuses on women (mainly middle class) in their day-to-day problems and relationships (with husbands, friends and lovers), their obsessions (beauty, fitness, diet, ecology), as well their fears, frustrations and dreams.

It is divided into three acts, preceded by three interludes, and is written in a fluent and ironical style. It is a very intelligent and funny compilation of the "fashionable truth" which everybody experiences and which creeps into our everyday conversation. It revolves around many different characters, shown in different locations: a restaurant, a maternity hospital and a private house during a birthday party, and it gives an idea of fragmentary life in the big city.

The plays written by Jorge Silva Melo, *António*, *A Boy from Lisbon* and *The End, or Have Mercy On Us*, are two of the most powerful dramatic pieces written in Portuguese lately. They are impressive in the way they combine the characterization of the world of young men (with their worries, fears and desire for love and tenderness) with a brilliant way of writing. It is not just a matter of style, of knowing how to evoke everyday conversation and make it fluent and arresting. Silva Melo also knows how to create an overwhelming structure that leads us, almost imperceptibly, to tragic deadlock. He does so by avoiding the normal conventions of the genre and by surprising us with the insertion of choral procedures masked in painful obsessions or in emotional crises emerging as poems. Whereas the former play is about a young man in his daily struggle in the big city, the latter is placed in a barracks and shows how a rave party can lead to both killing and dying. Everything in these two plays shows a powerful imagination and careful dramatic construction. Yet it also shows something that has been Jorge Silva Melo's main concern: to give life to a theatre for today, involving ordinary people, and declaring theatre as a major "political" statement (in the sense of belonging to the polis). His is a theatre which is really very stimulating anywhere in this world.

Notes

- ¹ Heiner Müller, *Missão e outras peças*. Translation and afterword by Anabela Mendes. Lisboa: Apáginastantas, 1982.
- ² Yvette K. Centeno, *As três cidras do amor*. Lisboa: Cotovia, 1991.
- ³ Carlos Porto, *Fábrica sensível*. Lisboa: Cotovia, 1992.
- ⁴ Natália Correia, *A pécora*. Lisboa: O Jornal, 1983
- ⁵ Vicente Sanches, *A birra do morto*. Castelo Branco, 1973.
- ⁶ Augusto Sobral, *Abel, Abel*. Lisboa: SPA, 1992: it is one of his most interesting plays, and it re-works the Biblical theme in a supposed naturalistic style. It centres on the problem of guilt and poses the question of whether envy and hate are not a consequence of the fear to which the weak become enslaved by arrogant force and power.
- ⁷ Luciana Steggano Picchio, *História do teatro português*. Lisboa: Portugália Editora, 1969
- ⁸ Mário de Carvalho, *Água em pena de pato (O sentido da epopeia; A rapariga de Varsóvia, Desencontro)*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1992
- ⁹ Fernando Augusto, *Solarium*. Lisboa: Centro de Documentação da ESTC, 1992
- ¹⁰ Mário de Carvalho, *A rapariga de Varsóvia* in *Água em pena de pato*, op. cit.
- ¹¹ José Saramago, *A noite*. Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1979.

- ¹² He has, however, written other plays, most of them commissioned either by theatre companies or, at least once, by an opera: a play on Luís de Camões and the ethical and political responsibility of intellectuals - *What shall I do with this book?* (1980); on San Francisco d'Assis, set up in a modern holding company: *Francisco of Assis's Second Life* (1987); and the libretto *In Nomine Dei* (1993), a moving choral tragedy about the struggle of Anabaptists, Lutherans and Catholics in Munster in the sixteenth century.
- ¹³ Written in 1990, it was published in 1991 (Lisboa: Edições Cotovia) and staged in November 1991 at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Sala Polivalente, ACARTE). It was translated into Italian by the Intercity Festival (Florence), organised by Laboratorio Nove and Teatro della Limonaia in 1995.
- ¹⁴ Jorge Silva Melo, *António, um rapaz de Lisboa*. Lisboa: Cotovia, 1995
- ¹⁵ Eduarda Dionísio, *Antes que a noite venha*. Lisboa: Cotovia, 1992.
It was also translated into Italian for the same Intercity Festival, in 1995.

Romania

Playwriting in Romania. The State of things or the things of state

Undated warning: "Customers are hereby notified we're closed until tomorrow"

Marian Popescu

The question of new writing has been a key issue in endless debates in the Romanian theatre for a long time. Viewed in the framework of a historical evolution, playwriting takes second place in the history of Romanian literature - even if important playwrights are obvious landmarks in it. The most significant period, although darkened by censorship in all its aspects, is still that of the '60s and '70s. Writers who were in their early thirties then provided the stage with a real stimulus. The period coincided with the second wave of absurdism coming from Central and Eastern Europe. In the case of Romania, an ideological thaw made this wave possible; in fact, whenever you deal with a topic like this, you can't avoid referring to the political context being shaped at the time. That happened, as you know, in Britain during the fifties, or in Germany after the war or in France in the sixties. The difference, in our case, lies in the duration and the intensity of a process in which politics and ideology took over for almost fifty years. They determined, in literature and theatre, a perverted relationship between creative artists and writers and their audiences.

The playwright himself or herself was exposed to a strenuous process. Most often it was a multilevel censorship, up to the point where he could see the play published or staged. Promoting a playscript was a task assumed not by an individual but by an ideological body, The Council for Culture.

Alternatively, it could be done by a publisher, who very often felt more at ease if the play had already been staged. That meant it had passed a first level of censorship.

Copyright for the Romanian playwright was organized in a very simple way: they paid him once for everything on the first occasion at which the work was published or staged. This payment was made as an advance and the royalties were collected by one single organization called The Literary Fund, which belonged to The Writers' Union. Requests for translation or foreign requests to perform a Romanian play were also handled by this Fund. The Fund acted, in fact, as a literary agent: the only one in the country.

The other thing worth mentioning is that the political and cultural authorities of the time obliged theatres to make sure that up to 50% of the repertoire was Romanian. There was a list of subjects and themes writers were allowed to write on, although later this was turned into a list of 'strong suggestions'. Nevertheless, many theatres tried to avoid this obligation, usually by putting on classics from the prewar period. That way, they hoped to escape censorship. In a way, this ensured that new plays became a kind of black sheep in Romanian theatre. There existed good new plays, but the number of bad or "ideologically commissioned" new plays was even greater. There was almost no room for workshops for new writing and this discouraged many younger people.

The playwright was often seen as a stranger in the world of the theatre practitioners, especially

among theatre directors. Naturally, there were exceptions. There were people who tried to get an inside view of theatre practice despite the many bad conditions.

One of the first and most obvious results to come from the changes in Romanian society after 1989 was that Romanian playwrights were put in an even more difficult position than before. When in 1990 I started the UNITER's Best Play of the Year competition for new plays, the first of its kind after 1989, I faced an amazing situation which did not change until many years later. Reading the hundreds of plays, as a member of the jury, I realized that the shock of the events which took place in our society after 1989 was not over. Many of those who submitted plays wrote as if nothing had happened to them or the people around them. What was even worse was that their attitude hadn't changed: it was as if censorship were still in place. Many authors gave me the feeling they were still isolated - not so much in a *tour d'ivoire*, but in a cell of which the door was ajar without anyone noticing. The Play competition will now go into its seventh year. In 1994, I began to publish the winning plays and promote all the plays in an attempt to make known what was happening with the new writing in Romania. Since then, I can definitely comment on some interesting phenomena that are connected closely to the central theme of this Conference.

The act of writing is a very private impulse. Homer may not have worried about it too much, but the contemporary writer worries a lot. The writing of a new play is a difficult process that needs stimulation and nurturing by financial bodies, foundations, grants and by friends - especially by friends. And by a theatre or director, too. But the most important thing of all, I think, is this wonderful need to express, to get an idea or a feeling across to others: an audience. However, I'm also fully aware that the theatre for its part needs new writing, whether it takes the form of a play or a text, and whether it is the result of an individual author's effort, or of a collective passion. The important thing, I believe, is, that an audience wants to hear something said about people in their own time, in the words of someone, a complete stranger, who shows his feelings and dares to plunge into this complicated and concrete world of ours. What does it mean, this world of ours? This is always a matter of thinking and feeling, of becoming ever more aware of who you are and where you are.

Only recently younger, unknown writers have started to take an interest in subjects formerly hidden, but that are now revealed by a continuous growth of reality. This growth of reality is fostered by free circulation of information, thus emphasizing the major role the media played all these years.

These young authors tackle their subjects either by means of direct language - which is still a rare thing - or try to place them in the past. Two of them are especially interesting: Alina Mungiu, author of the winning play *The Evangelists* and Vlad Zografi with *Petru (Peter)*. Both plays are good examples of the second trend, and stand a good chance to attract the interest of theatres. I could mention some other examples.

Some established writers of the pre-1989 era, like Dumitru Solomon, Iosif Naghiu and D.R.Popescu, are still active. Their new plays have, save a few exceptions, not made it to the stage. They were published either by UNITEXT, the only theatre publishers in Romania, with several drama and theatre series, or by other publishers, like Expansion Publishing House that has only one series of new plays. Some plays these authors wrote are based on the turn in Romanian history that occurred in December 1989. The only one worthy of being staged is *The Special Hospital*, a winning play by Iosif Naghiu, which was indeed performed.

The fate of interesting plays written after 1990 depends heavily on the actual political context, as theatre directors and managers (and sometimes even the actors in the cast) are fully aware of the implications of their choice. This touches upon a very important point: the development of a civic society in Romania. One of the most urgent preconditions for this is a full revelation of what has happened in our recent history. Some of the major political parties sensed the importance of this point. Especially after the elections in November 1996, when the political opposition came into power in Romania, the claim for truth became insistent. I detected a similar trend in plays submitted to UNITER's play contest since 1994. A further trend, which is linked to the tradition of that great classic of our theatre, Caragiale, deals with comedy: many plays are a reflection of social themes. They find their roots in previously unknown (read: not made public until 1989) phenomena such as corrupt politics, freedom of sexual behaviour, fly-by-night patriots etc. These plays have a language of their own in which the authors tend to assert a newly acquired sense of speaking freely. Among the new plays there's also a slight tendency to return to the Romanian cultural heritage, e.g. by recovering a moral attitude towards life under the new circumstances. I think that some of these plays are not only of local interest; in fact, we can't assume indefinitely that something very important happened only in the former Soviet block after the end of the Cold War. Different processes on different levels have happened or are still happening in the West as well. All that can be said is that some of the new plays by contemporary foreign authors are more likely to be found on stages in Central or Eastern Europe than the other way round. Yet I think we could do a bit more to improve this situation.

I would now like to talk about my own experience in the field of promoting new writing. Before the Copyright Law was established in Romania (1996), I had to find ways and financial means to help authors, whether they were old or young, to attain some kind of personal relationship with theatres, publishers, Radio and TV, and foreign literary agencies. Within UNITEXT, I set up a literary agency which depends financially on UNITER (The Theatre Union of Romania) and which, beginning in 1993, began to represent authors. This publishing house, UNITEXT, is not only a publisher, but also forms the organizational frame of the play contest. On top of that, it is a literary agent. We have contacts with other literary agencies, theatre publishers, and theatre magazines. I'm afraid these contacts are still limited, as two people do all the work at UNITEXT! For some of the most interesting new plays, we try to find money to get them translated into English and French. After that, we circulate them, making use of our personal contacts, but also on request from abroad. Since 1995, UNITEXT has also been publishing a theatre magazine called 'Semnal teatral' (Theatre Signal). A section of the magazine is dedicated to synopses of new Romanian and foreign plays. The Romanian synopses are translated into English and/or French. After twelve months, the results were that more Romanian theatres asked for some of the full versions of new foreign plays. As we represent authors and translators, we make contracts with theatres, not based on official fees but on negotiated ones. At the beginning, it was difficult to make theatre managers understand that we are now in the year 1997 when some things have changed and that there are now literary agents who ask for performance rights before the production is started! This is also related to a new kind of social behaviour, with a non-centralized and unique body doing the monitoring. This is unlike what happened before and is starting to find its way into society as a whole. However, UNITEXT is, I'm afraid, the only example of this kind of promotion and representation

centered around a publishing house. "Simona Kessler" is one of the new literary agencies in Romania, but drama is not their focus although they act as a subagent for foreign publishers and agencies. When I asked for their list there were only three playwrights on it. The rest are novelists and others. UNITEXT is now publishing the first ever Annual of the Romanian theatre ('95-'96 season) and the figures show that Romanian plays for that season amount to approx. 15-20% of the repertoire. There are theatres with more Romanian titles, say three or four out of six or seven plays. But the number of new plays staged each season is far lower. Last season there were about twenty. That's a slight improvement compared to some previous seasons. What is new is that the incoming staff at the Ministry of Culture is likely to be more instrumental in this matter. There's a possibility that UNITER's support for new writing will be reinforced by clear financial support to stimulate playwrights and create a proper status for them in Romania. Another aspect of the problem is that we should prepare the ground for a closer relationship between author and theatre by making them work together as a team during the process, and not as separate entities. This also depends on how political matters, the State and the government develop. We are waiting for them to modify outdated legislation and existing laws which were inadvertently established between 1992 and 1996. ■

Russia

The dreams of Russian drama*Ekaterina Salnikova*

The Soviet era and the 'Perestroika' period have already become part of Russian history. We're now living in the epoch of 'Post Perestroika', as it's often called. The majority of the population don't feel that they are the citizens of a great state, with its ideology, culture and economy. The Russian world is divided into many different parts. Some ex-Soviet republics have obtained independence. And the links between them and Russia, as well as the links between the regions inside Russia, are weak and irregular. There's a widening gap between groups in society. Nobody suffers from the dictates of the totalitarian state and the Communist Party anymore. But at the same time, Russian people are only now beginning to realize that they were used to having government support and directions on how to live, to work and to think. The situation of freedom is stressful. Some people say, 'Our country has left us to fend for ourselves, it doesn't need us'. On the one hand they are wrong, thinking about the state as if it were a teacher or their parent. On the other hand they are partly right. The freedom and the independence of a person in our life today entails the freedom of the 'savage' world out there to impose its will on people. Freedom now means the absence of many necessary laws and rights, of social rules, and sometimes of an opportunity to get work and to be paid for it. Freedom and chaos now often go hand in hand.

So people feel very uneasy. Sometimes they don't understand the process of permanent change in everyday life. Nobody can be sure what will happen tomorrow, or even in an hour. The economic and social - and especially the political - situations are rapidly changing and from one day to the next the world can become unrecognizable. Nobody is capable of grasping the structure of our present society, and of transferring it into a system of images. Playwrights are ordinary people whose psychology is the same as that of people with other professions. So the playwrights too can only turn to their feelings, and to their mood, and try to express their emotions in plays.

The idea of collectivism has gone. Present-day life cultivates the idea of individualism. Every person should first take care of himself, should think about what his use is, and take care of his personal interests and possessions. It's a totally new way of thinking. People can feel the loneliness of the endless world. How do you write about it? Realistic aesthetics appear to be no more than a banality. They can't say anything new about life. Our culture is tired of realism. And the contemporary playwrights are trying to find new, original ways to interpret the world objectively. They are trying to invent their own language of images and motives. Sometimes their cultural 'individualism' is too strong. And the dramatists end up in a situation of total destruction of language. Often the main difficulty is not to realize what the ideas behind the plot are, but to understand the plot itself. You have to guess what happened to the characters, who they are and what the author is trying to put forward. Communication between the author and the reader, the director, and the actor, is disappearing. Each of them speaks his own language, which the others don't know. This causes serious problems to directors who have to decide what play to perform. More and more, they choose

a classical play, just because it gives an illusion of an understandable world, of clear images. Maybe a director will never understand the philosophical essence of Shakespeare's or Chekhov's drama, but he thinks that these authors are in line with his thoughts and his idea of life. Contemporary directors sometimes love the simplicity of the classics, so full of talent, clarity and wisdom, because the lack of clear ideas in everyday life, which is so full of obscurity, irrationality and strangeness, makes them suffer. Something in art then has to compensate for the instability of the real world. Meanwhile, the dramatists would like to hide themselves in the inside of their souls, thoughts and emotions. It is impossible to speak about general tendencies in Russian drama. There are as many tendencies as there are playwrights. Every playwright has his or her special "tendency" under development. However, we can speak about the everyday difficulties that most Russian playwrights encounter, such as the impossibility to write a play about contemporary Russian life. We can call this process 'estrangement'. The dramatists avoid showing our world because it is alien to them. If somebody tries to create a plot dealing with a present-day situation in life, he uses the traditional and even conservative models of characters, which we know so well from XIX century melodrama and comedy. The poor and the rich people, lovers and villains, comic guys and funny girls - they could be characters in any epoch in many countries. And these characters can't show the specific details of our contemporary existence.

Still, there are several plays that display a modern look at the world and the essence of some present-day conflicts. One of the most interesting ones is *Travelling on the Border* by the young playwright Ivan Savelyev. The main characters are a boy, Arkady, of eleven, and a girl, Anna, who is eight years old. They don't have parents and live at a college for homeless children. Their great wish is to have a family and to live in a private house. But there's no one who wants to adopt them. So the boy and the girl begin to look for ways 'to slip into' a family. They behave like classical villains; they write anonymous hate letters and observe the life of the adults and learn about their horrible secrets. Their childish blackmail helps for a short time. The characters manage to get 'parents'. They are prepared to do all the work around the house and look after the adults. Yet the adults don't want any help, nor do they want any children, because it means having new duties. The grownups turn out to be more childish than the kids. They are not able to take care of anybody, not even themselves. Arkady and Anna one day lock the adults in a room and have a 'farewell party' for two. The two children eat tasty things, talk very politely, in the style of old romantic films and tell each other the story of their quest for a family. They give beautiful toys as presents to each other. However, it's a sad festive moment in the last minutes of life, because the two understand that they will never be happy. They will never win the struggle with the cruel world. And nobody needs them. They tried to change their life according to the well-known model of crime films. And they lack the power to begin all over again. The dramatic conflict becomes very intense, like in a well-made play or a thriller. Still, the main idea is far from traditional. People are unable to be children during childhood and are unable to grow up. The family is disappearing; it is being destroyed. People don't have the opportunities or even the desire to continue living. So they stay alone. Arkady and Anna get up onto the windowsill, open the window and step outside...

Not having a place to live is the theme of another play, *The Old Man from the Wardrobe*, by Sergey Vinokurov. An old homeless man hides in a wardrobe as a young man moves house. Certain people have made the old man sign his will. In it, they've made him write that he will give them his

apartment after he dies. Next, they've forced the old man out of his home. He is still alive, but he doesn't have an opportunity to return to his apartment. The killers are waiting for him there. The young man who is moving doesn't know what to do with his strange guest. At times murderers or the police visit them, and threaten them or promise help. Finally, the old man dies and turns into a ghost, who gets out of bed and moves about. Even after his death, he doesn't have a place to live; he's doomed to continue a homeless life for ever. Though the story can't be called very funny, there are many comic situations. People can laugh at their unsolved problems.

Ksenya Dragunskaya's play *Man, the Brother of Woman* shows modern social prototypes, while using the traditional Russian cultural archetypes to refer to contemporary life and to highlight differences. Present-day people are made to look like characters in *The Idiot* by Fiodor Dostoyevsky, as if nothing in the world has changed. When you read this play, the main feeling is that bad luck follows people around in every century, whatever the economic or social situation. And that good fortune is not so much within the world, or in the universe, but somewhere inside people's souls, inside their tempers. It's obscure dreams and hopes that cause people to make mistakes all the time. A young musical conductor meets a beautiful variety dancer, Larissa, and thinks that she's his sister, whom he hasn't seen since their childhood. The conductor does everything he can to save her from the madhouse. Many other characters, fairy-tale-like magical persons, help him. But at the end of the play the conductor discovers that fate has played a horrible trick on him and that Larissa isn't his sister at all. Instead there's another woman who is his sister, and he has to begin all over again. We can see this mistake as a catastrophic misunderstanding of the essence of life and people's relations.

To have the power to change bad fortune, and to give life a twist into a different direction, seems to be the greatest dream of the contemporary Russian playwright. *The Wife from Sakhalin* by Elena Gremina shows the dramatic relations between ex-prisoners who live on Sakhalin Island, in the far east of Russia. In the past, each of them has committed one or more murders because of betrayal or jealousy. Now the conflict of the 'love triangle' returns. The characters are ready to repeat their crimes. It's as if some unknown magic force makes them behave the same way they did many years ago. But then they suddenly stop and start to rebuild their lives and relationships. How did they manage this 'rebirth' and achieve a happy end and avoid their horrible fortune? Nobody can give the answer. The author doesn't show the process in 'real time', the long period of trial and suffering. We only see the ideal family in the final scene of the play. How was it possible to become happy, to transform gloomy passion into positive feelings? Why did harmony appear in their world? It is a miracle and a mystery to us. This kind of happy end has come about without any logic, without convincing arguments. It was merely the will of the dramatist, a melodramatic method, a theatrical convention. So the reader and spectator can ask themselves: what have we been reading or watching? Has it only been a play, a virtual space in the author's consciousness? Moreover, there's a second layer, which bases its imagery on the motif of Chekhov being present indirectly. Sometimes the characters speak about the famous writer, but that's not the most important thing. The fact that Chekhov's dramas and stories are quoted freely in the lines of the ex-prisoners is a much more complicated issue. The characters quote Chekhov's masterpieces in their everyday words, arguments and soliloquies - as if they're their own words and phrases. The situation allows an ambivalent interpretation. Maybe Chekhov will write down the lines of those people and will create his outstanding plays with their help. Another possibility is that Chekhov's imminent arrival causes his

texts to appear 'out of the blue' here on Sakhalin Island. The characters 'swallow' them, breath along with Chekhov's literature. The comic and melodramatic characters are given a new and unexpected quality, and are turned into a mixture of different aesthetics.

What are these characters - symbolic figures or real people? Is it still possible to believe that the objective world and living people are not part of the fictitious reality of somebody's mind? These questions come to the fore especially when a character dies. The most difficult thing to do for the characters is to die, be forever dead, as it is for us living creatures. 'To kill his character' is the most difficult problem for an author, because the people in plays are not alive enough. They stand far removed from organic substance; they can only be called the relatives of dolls and ghosts. In the final scene of Olga Mikhaylova's *The Russian Dream*, people are no longer real: "Katrin takes a knife, comes up to Ilya and stabs him with it. She stands puzzled, then she touches Ilya's shoulder, turns him effortlessly and lifts him slightly: out of the hole in his breast fall rags, pieces of paper and dry leaves; his rag arms and legs dangle, his drawn face smiles". This scene is a metaphor of the mood of "sorrowful insensibility" that overtook the character of the girl or the author simultaneously. It's a symbol of life's and love's energy being exhausted. The motif of unreal death, of relative events, and of make-believe reality return in other plays by Olga Mikhaylova and by some other dramatists. The feeling of drama is intensified, not because we're witnessing the end of someone's life, but because we lose confidence in the existence of real persons. The extreme moment never really 'bursts out', because it remains veiled in a maze of symbolic details, fantasies and associations.

What we observe is the double existence of the characters. They are not just suffering and struggling to realize their interests and their happiness - or even the freedom just to have the kind of unhappiness they need to express their individuality - but they are reflecting on the methods of creating images, of creating themselves.

In Mikhail Ugarov's play *The Newspaper Russky Invalid, July, 18...* Ivan Pavlovich starts to cry desperately about his personal tragedy and then switches to hysterics about the lie of so-called 'realistic' art: 'I don't understand! Yes-s!.. Don't understand!.. They write down the year in which the events took place - for the greater significance! Yet it never, never at all happened! Why, why do you lie, why do you indicate the year, the day, whether it's winter or summer, the hour and the place where everything happened!.. "Looking at her, he thought that..." How the hell can you know what he was thinking when he looked at her?! You fool, you stranger, you will never guess!.. The character says that no one should allow himself to get involved in a plot in which a scoundrel (he means the author - Ek.S.) gives a special meaning to life's haphazard events and finds their universal connections. He finds reasons, consequences, a beginning, a middle and an end! What a horror!.. And the most ridiculous thing is there's a style there! Oh-oh, the style!..'

Idiosyncrasy obviously grows when one looks at an author who is vainly trying to explain the world and to regulate natural chaos. The character is certain that traditional art can't show reality, because it tries to explore the matter of life, to investigate it. But the true way is just to describe everything you see. Then the character begins to describe what his room looks like, repeating the words of the author's first stage direction. The character is ready to become the author of his own life and to create himself.

In the play *Tanya-Tanya* by Olga Mukhina, something similar happens. The text of the dialogue is combined with naive pictures and old-fashioned black-and-white photographs. The people are put into

this imaginary world, which has been made up by the author or by themselves. They are too weak for the complicated world, so full of big unsolved problems. There is a Russian children's poem which says:

We'll draw the house

And we shall live in it.

The characters speak only about their private relationships, about love and the absence of it, about the weather, food and nature. The idea of the character is: "The space of people and salads separates us". There are no any political, social or economic details in the words. Guessing when the events happen is difficult. The characters live in an abstract sort of time, in an abstract reality. "We are flying, like Marc Chagal's lovers", someone says in the play. They are indeed almost flying, if taken metaphorically. Because there is no tangible ground, society, *socium*. The feelings of present-day people, flying over the desert of Russian civilization, are the most common subject of plays nowadays. The further development of Russian drama depends on many factors: how will Russian people get used to the epoch of individualism, and how will Russian dramatists find new aesthetic models. ■

Slovenia

One-way Slovene communication with Europe*Darja Dominkuš*

Playwriting has always been a very important branch of Slovene literature. Nearly all important writers since the Second World War have written plays, and some of their masterpieces belong to the recent history of Slovene playwriting and of course to the history of drama as well. Very few authors (Ivan Mrak, 1905-1986, is the most famous among them) wrote so-called closet dramas. And premieres of interesting new plays have always been 'events', culturally and artistically, publicly and socially, and sometimes even politically too.

So, contemporary Slovene drama has some classics that have contributed to the wealth of its forms and ideas. They also comply with the highest literary standards: Domonik Smole (1929-1992) is the author of what is probably the most famous Slovene contemporary play, a modern version of Sophocles' *Antigone* (1960). It is highly original in pointing out the moral dilemmas of its protagonists and is artistically well worked-out. Smole also wrote some "Beckettian" grotesque plays in which he skilfully and ironically depicted the strange and chaotic present-day world. (*The Tiny Golden Shoes*, 1983).

Gregor Strniša (1930-1987) is one of the most important modern Slovene poets. He wrote so-called poetic plays, moral parables about modern man, extremely rich in their symbolic and mythical imagery. They're taken from the Bible, from folktales and also from Germanic medieval art, and are also founded upon his own philosophic, non-anthropocentric system (*Unicorn*, 1967, *Frogs or the Parable of Wretched and Rich Lazar*, 1969, *The People-eaters*, 1972).

Primož Kozak (1939-1981) was a brilliant intellectual, a master in debating, who questioned revolution, ideology and the independence of the individual. His plays on revolution and post-revolutionary disillusion, with politically engaged dialogues in the manner of Sartre, represent the existential conflict between the intellectual and the revolution, which leads to personal tragedy (*The Affair*, 1962; *Congress*, 1968; *The Legend of the Saintly Che*, 1969).

We can always expect the pleasant surprise of an interesting new play among the 'living' classics. Andrej Hieng (1925), a writer and director, wrote dramas on historical topics full of contemporary allusions (*The Return of Cortes*, 1969; *The Conqueror*, 1971; *Phoney Joan*, 1973) and middle-class family plays (*The Lost Son*, 1976, *Bridegroom's Evening*, 1979).

Dane Zajc (1929) is a prominent poet of the Slovene avant-garde. Strong expression and a gloomy view of the modern world are typical features of his work. Showing the experience of present-day man, his verse plays combine a masterly use of language and the application of archetypal myths, both Slovene and Finnish ones (*Voranc*, 1978; *Kalevala*, 1986; *Grmae*, 1993).

Rudi Šeligo (1935) is the author of modernistic fiction and plays that range from formal experiment to historical dramas (*Ana*, 1984). He also writes plays based on the old folklore archetypes, but depicting modern urban life (*The Witch from Upper Davča*, 1977; *The Beautiful Vida*, 1978; *The Marriage*, 1980).

There are two outstanding authors in the generation who started writing in the seventies, when experimental theatre suddenly took off. Dušan Jovanović (1939) is a director and playwright whose rich oeuvre is not only a sort of guide through the modern history of the theatre but also a history of thought and social events. For Jovanović, theatre essentially corresponds to processes going on simultaneously in wider society. He started with 'trifling' absurd plays as a reaction against the traditional, serious tendencies in the theatre and the prevailing taste of the audience (*Stamps*, and also *Emilia*, 1969; *Fools*, 1970; *Play the Tumour in the Head or the Air Pollution*, 1972). Attacking recent historical taboos, he then created a type of modern tragedy (*The Liberation of Skopje*, 1978; *The Karamazovs*, 1980). Mixing grotesque and fantastic elements with current topics, he prophetically warned in the 1980s that reality was going to surpass even our darkest and most unbelievable expectations (*The Military Secret*, 1983; *Victor or the Day of Youth*, 1989; *The Soothsayer*, 1989; *The Wall, the Lake*, 1989; *Don Juan in Agony*, 1991).

Milan Jesih (1950), a prominent poet and translator (e.g. of Shakespeare), started with similar poetics. With his masterly use of language, parody, satire, numerous puns and various comic effects he dismantled the classic form of drama and replaced it with a micro-dramatic structure, changing protagonists and the absence of a hero in the classic sense (*The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, 1974; *Fresh-woman or the Period of Adjustment*, 1976; *Triko*, 1985; *To Love*, 1984).

Drago Jančar's (1948) work has been translated most often. This writer displays contemporary themes and paradoxes behind historical topics and applies them critically to the present situation. (*Dissident Arnož and his Folks*, 1982; *The Great Brilliant Waltz*, 1985; *Stake out at Godot's*, 1987; *Daedalus*, 1988).

Playwriting in the nineties

In the beginning of the nineties, a number of political processes took place very quickly and violently: a change of the system along with the new independent state, a short war in Slovenia and a long and exhausting war nearby. The theatre could not and did not want to keep up with reality. There was a gap in the playwriting too. It appeared that authors were looking for new relevant themes or rather, they appeared to be waiting for new themes to 'find' their authors. Nevertheless, as we approach the end of the nineties, we can summarize some processes in the playwriting of the current decade.

There was an explosion of so-called physical theatre a combination of choreography and some theatrical elements, but without a text in the classic sense. The most prominent and successful representative of this kind of theatre, is the Betontact Teater with Matjaž Pograjc, who is both author and director of the productions. Many of them were successfully presented abroad.

Another characteristic of the nineties is the so-called theatre of images created by Tomaž Pandur in Maribor's National Theatre. He used the play only as a pretext for performances in which his visual imagination prevailed over other elements. Two of his productions were based on plays by Ivo Svetina (1948), an avant-garde poet and dramaturg. *Scheherezade* (1989) and *Babylon (The Gardens and a Dove)*, 1996) are based on oriental myths, and deal with the question of sensuality and power. Within the market economy, the question of revenues is perhaps more important than it used to be. (Theatres in Slovenia are mostly repertoire oriented and subsidized by the state). The works of some authors guarantee box office success. Tone Partljič (1940) writes satirical comedies on modern life. His most recent one was on the struggle for political power in the 'new democracy'.

Quite an outstanding phenomenon was the box office success of Evald Flisar, whose most famous play *What about Leonardo?* (1994) is a kind of parable on modern man, demonstrated by psychiatric cases from Oliver Sacks's book 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat'.

One of the few authors writing continuously is Dušan Jovanović with his 'war' plays: *Antigone* (1993); *The Puzzle of Courage* (1994); *Who Sings Sisyphus* (1997). He deals with questions of personal guilt in historical circumstances. His writing is directed towards the open form of a work-in-progress.

Also, some authors write only for their theatrical needs: Damir Zlatar Frey (1954), a choreographer and director, the artistic manager of The Koreodrama Theatre, and Andrej Rozinan Roz (1955), who is the artistic manager, director and actor of The Ana Monro Theatre. This is a kind of 'suburban' theatre, with performances based on improvisation, cabaret and other popular genres.

A season ticket system prevails in most theatres. Even so, these theatres rarely decide to take a risk by putting on unpopular or unestablished domestic authors. Sometimes their plays remain unperformed even after they've been published and given an award. (*Matjaž Zupančič* (1959); *The Exorcists*, 1991).

Assessing the chances of Slovene drama being produced abroad is difficult, but its chances should be big enough when you compare it with some of the foreign plays. Although the issues may be local, the theatre here is taken very seriously. The playwrights always search for fundamental issues, so that Slovene plays may be less fun than some others, but are always far from shallow.

The wider public is mainly interested in comedies. Contemporary plays represent about 60-70 % of theatre production. Domestic plays represent about 25-50 % of annual production.

Very few contemporary Slovene plays have been produced abroad. Jovanović's *Antigone* was produced in Vienna in the Wiener Festwochen Festival in 1993 as a result of a co-production between the festival and The Slovene National Theatre, but it was done in Slovene. Evald Flisar's play *Tomorrow*, 1992 was staged in London in November 1993 and his *What about Leonardo?* was produced in Reykjavik, Iceland. Both productions were the results of personal contacts (Flisar is bilingual and lives in London and Ljubljana).

In our country no professional organizations exist for the promotion of our plays abroad. The Slovenian Writers' Association pays for some translations of Slovene literature into foreign languages, sometimes also for dramas. It occasionally prepares information about Slovene playwrights and short summaries of their works.

When participating at festivals abroad, a theatre sometimes publishes the translation of the play (for example *Grmače* by Zajc at the Bonner Biennale 1996). But this is rather exceptional because it is difficult for a theatre to cover the costs of translating and printing. This is more or less everything that can be said about promoting playwrights abroad.

Helpful address:

Slovenian Writers Association, Tomsiceva 12, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, fax +386 61 214 144.

Spain

Spanish playwriting

Ignacio Herrera de la Muela

1. A brief overview of Spanish contemporary playwriting

Currently, playwriting in Spain can be subdivided into three groups of authors. In defining them, the death of Franco can be used as a reference point. This is an important date because:

- political censorship ceased;
- Spain embarked on a period of transition and transformation into a nation of autonomous states with three more official languages besides Spanish: Catalan, Galician and Basque;
- the country also underwent a period of significant economic growth, especially after joining the EU, ending years of political isolation.

These three groups are:

- those who wrote under the dictatorship, but tried to avoid its restrictions. Their plays were published and performed but were critical of the regime;
- those whose writing career began in the seventies, e.g. during the transition (which had already begun in the last years of Franco's rule). A few of them were vocally anti-Franco. They were not even performed in the main theatres after Franco's death, since they had lost their relevance owing to the 'agreement to forget', which was typical of the transition period.
- those in the youngest group, born in the sixties and seventies, have no direct memory or experience of Franco's rule. The rapid changes in Spanish society have formed them and they write in one or more of the four official languages.

The first group is a large one and still of great importance. Their style of writing is realistic. Their work has continued to evolve; they have been able to leave behind the dictatorship which they endured and against which they used their art. Examples of these writers are:

Buero-Vallejo: *Las trampas del azar* (1994), *El sueño de la razón* (1995);

Alfonso Sastre: *Taberna Fantástica* (written in 1963; performed in 1985);

Rodríguez-Méndez: *Pájaro Solitario* (1994);

Benet i Jornet: *Testamento* (1995); the author has assimilated political change and continues to write. His new work is written and performed in the new theatrical styles.

We can compile a long list of names of writers, many of whom have died in the last five years, whose names I do not include here. Others, still alive, typify a generation of writers whose work, although widely performed within Spain, is not interesting enough to be considered as material for export or translation.

The second group of writers, those who started writing professionally in the seventies, take the political changes of the last twenty years in their stride, but still refer frequently to the Civil War and other aspects of twentieth-century Spanish history.

This group was responsible for the introduction of the teaching of dramaturgy in the eighties and became the mentors of the following generation. They were witnesses to, and participants in, the

official policy of promoting Spain as a multilingual society. Many of them either already write in two languages or are automatically translated. This group has written the most important theatre of the eighties. Their work has been exported to South America and translated widely.

Examples of this group include:

José Sanchís Sinisterra: *Ay, Carmela!*, *Naque*, *El cerco de Leningrado*;

Fermín Cabal: *Vade retro* (1983), *Esta noche gran velada*, *Caballito del diablo* (1985);

Rodolf Sidera: *El veri del teatro* (1985), *Indian Summer* (1991);

Alonso de Santos: *Bajarse al moro*, *Album Familiar*;

Ignacio del Moral: *La mirada del hombre oscuro*.

The third group has grown up with the period of socialist government (which began in 1982) as their political reference point. The policy of making the Kingdom of Spain a group of autonomous regions was confirmed in this period. Autonomous governments implemented a policy of supporting writing in the national language, and promoting alternative theatre (fringe, studios etc.) based on urban themes. The writers in this group deal with a wide range of themes. Free of the obligation to provide a response to the political situation, they focus on commenting and criticizing social and human conditions. A typical aspect characterizing much their work is the use and abuse of sexuality as a theme, and sexual language. (In my view this aspect is so typical it has become almost a cliché). Writers in the Basque country, for example, refer to the Basque problem, but treat it universally (e.g. *Por mis muertos*, written by Bernardo Atxaga and four others). This generation crystallizes the process begun by their predecessors. As writers they have become much more part of the theatrical production process. Many of these writers direct their own work or promote collective productions. Also, like their predecessors they earn a living by writing scripts for film and television. Examples are:

Sergi Belbel: *Talem* (1989), *Elsa Schneider*, *Antes del diluvio*;

Rodrigo García: *Acera derecha*, *Notas de cocina*, *Martillo*

Antonio Alamo: *Los borrachos*

Juan Mayorga: *El sueño de Ginebra*, *El traductor de Bloomenberg*

There are many more which lack of space prevents me from mentioning here.

Common trends:

In general one can say that the most interesting contemporary writing for the theatre has gone beyond the use of a metaphor of life, the world. It is closer to everyday life: not in the sense of the routine, but in the sense of real life. Many writers are looking at a new language, both in their writing and in the way their works are performed. Today, the playwright is closer than ever to the stage and further from the information and news media. Today's playwrights seem to have more confidence than ever in their ability to recover their audience and create new audiences for their work.

2. Is contemporary Spanish playwriting of interest outside Spain?

Spanish contemporary theatre is local in the sense that its characters and situations are usually placed in a local setting. However, the themes are universal: unemployment, corruption, drugs, loneliness, social and sexual issues. The Spanish context of the issues gives the theme its colour and interest. The universality of the themes gives the work its accessibility. Examples of works that have been successfully exported:

Ay, Carmela! by Sanchís Sinisterra. The context is the Spanish civil war. The story is about a couple of travelling comedians, man and woman. She is shot. The theme: sentiment, tenderness, tragedy, humour. Summarized: it explains how humans endure a civil war (any civil war), using the background of the Spanish Civil War.

Another example: *Crampack* by Jordi Sánchez. The context is urban: a group of friends sharing a flat. The story, told in humorous terms, is of their waxing and waning friendships and desires. The theme is universal: human sexuality and feelings.

Farsas maravillosas by Alfonso Zorro. Through a series of anecdotes using traditional characters and classical format, the author exposes the corruption, exploitation and ostentation of the Church.

A limiting factor, however, in the accessibility of Spanish theatre is the lack of consistent quality in the writing. We can ascribe this to several factors:

the lack of professional theatre criticism and general lack of theatre coverage in the media;

the low levels of teaching or practice of writing and theatre in schools;

the decrease in the theatre public (see below);

an undemanding public (nouveau riche, after the excesses of the eighties);

the politicization of culture: the state acts as the largest theatre impresario.

3. How much contemporary theatre writing is performed in Spain?

I can state clearly that there is not a high level of interest in contemporary theatre writing within Spain today.

Lorca, Calderón, Valle-Inclán, Lope de Vega, all sell seats in the official theatres in Spain today. Few living writers can expect to reach the same size of audience. The private commercial theatres in Madrid, for example, working in cooperation with government bodies (through subsidies) generally produce comedies, musicals and melodramas written by foreign (mainly Anglo Saxon) authors. Still, some theatre companies are currently producing collective work such as *La Cubana*, *Els Joglars*, *Comediants* and *Companya T*. They have had considerable success. Grounds for optimism also exist if we look at the growing number of fringe theatres. Some have programmes that work with reasonable success. Overall however, the current situation is poor.

Here are the figures.

Madrid, all theatres:

Year	% Spanish texts of new productions	% living Spanish authors of total new productions
82	53	37
83	48	30
84	48	35
85	42	27
86	53	30
87	45	27
92	56	32
96	41	27
Average	48	30

And a look at all text theatre productions currently on show in Madrid on one day in February of this year:

7.2.97	32	17
--------	----	----

In the Spanish state national theatre (Centro Dramático Nacional, also based in Madrid) the situation gives even less ground for optimism:

Average for years:

75-95	33	16
-------	----	----

The State National Theatre for New Scenic Tendencies (Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas, also based in Madrid) has raised hopes. For all its own productions between 1984 and 1994 the figures were as follows:

84-94	69	44
-------	----	----

However, these hopes have been dashed. This state national theatre was abolished by the new, central government elected in March 1996.

The situation in Barcelona, Spain's second largest city and capital of the most important autonomous region, Catalunya, is different. The Catalan autonomous regional government actively promotes the writing and performing of theatre in the local language, Catalan. In the Catalan national theatre (Centre Dramatic de la Generalitat), the figures are as follows:

80	28	28
81	60	40
82	50	0
83	50	30
84	33	33
85	38	25
86	80	60
87	67	67
88	83	33
89	70	70
90	83	67
91	66	33
92	60	40
93	83	50
94	64	36
Aver.80-94	61	41

The situation in another autonomous region with its own language, Galicia, is similar. In the Galician national theatre (Instituto Galego das Artes Escénicas e Musicais) the figures are:

Average for years:

84-94	50	43
-------	----	----

And again, in the Andalucian national theatre (Centro Andaluz de Teatro), with no official language but a strong, regional identity:

89-96	78	33
-------	----	----

These figures should be seen in the context of the total theatre-going audience. The theatre-going public has, overall, decreased dramatically over the years.

In the 1984-85 season there were 2.7 million theatre visits in the whole of Spain. In '94-'95 theatre visits totalled 1.6 million, a decrease of some 40%. The following year saw a slight recovery to 1.9 million.

In the last ten years the number of theatre performances has decreased some 30% in Madrid. (Yet in Barcelona the number remains unchanged over the same period.)

So what else are the Spaniards doing with their time now that they are not going to the theatre so much? In the same 10-year period there were created: three new national private TV channels, nine autonomous (regional) TV stations (and any number of smaller, local channels). The number of cinemas, and audience attendance there, has increased by 40% in the same period. The number of bullfights grew by 47%; football matches by 20% and the number of cars on the road by more than 300%.

Yet 'culture' supposedly has not decreased: the number of university students has grown by 60% in the last ten years and the number of books published grew by 45%.

Theatre as an art is now, clearly, a minority form in Spain. But the number of playwrights is still increasing, and significantly so. Clearly, the new generations still need a way to express themselves whether they have an audience or not.

4. Are Spanish plays exported at present?

The number of Spanish plays translated into a foreign language is not high. I estimate that no more than twenty contemporary writers are translated on a regular basis. The number of plays by living writers that actually receive a performance in another language is even lower. By my estimate, in the past five years no more than fifty works have been translated and performed for a significant audience. However, many texts are continually being translated and studied, if not performed, by universities and specialists. They often undertake this process on the basis of purely personal or individual interests or fields of specialization.

Several ways exist in which a work may eventually reach a foreign audience:

the private initiative of a theatre in the host country, such as producers who know the author and his work;

foreign festivals to which official Spanish bodies submit work (having paid for its translation);
literary agents and cultural exchange associations (eg Hispanité Explorations, Royal Court Theatre, Schauspielhaus Hamburg);

the Spanish Ministry of Culture produced an annual catalogue of new work written in Spanish. This was published at the Frankfurt Book Fair to capture the interest of foreign publishers and producers. However, this initiative was abolished in 1991.

freelance translators (many of them study plays academically) submit translated texts to foreign theatre companies.

5. Mechanisms in Spain for the promotion of Spanish playwriting abroad.

I do not know of any organization in Spain primarily dedicated to the promotion of the work of Spanish playwrights outside Spain. However, various bodies take an interest in some aspects of the promotion abroad of this kind of work. Several national and local government bodies have money available to fund foreign productions, namely the Spanish Foreign Ministry (Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales); the Ministry of Culture (through the Instituto Nacional de Artes Escénicas y de la Música); the Catalan regional government (through the Corporación para la promoción de la cultura catalana) and the Madrid regional government (through the Centro de estudios y actividades culturales). The financial help available is small and usually can represent no more than 15% at most of the total cost of a production. Political considerations can also come into play in the adjudication process.

Money is also available to fund translations from bodies such as:

cultural departments of autonomous and local governments

subsidies from the Dirección General del Libro* and Dirección General de Cooperación Cultural (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura)

Spanish embassies abroad

Institució de les Lletres catalanes

private cultural foundations**

philological departments of universities

Instituto Cervantes (exceptionally)

Sociedad General de Autores y Editores (exceptionally). This is the main organization responsible for protecting authors' rights and collecting royalties. It has historically been more zealous in this task than in the equally important one of promoting its members' work.

There is no official school of translation specializing in theatre texts.

*This body hands out subsidies to publishers (99% foreign) to cover the costs of translations of scientific, critical and literary works. Theatre texts account for no more than 1.5% of the funds disbursed.

** At the time of writing I only know of one, of which I am the director.

(The author is director of the Cultural Foundation "El Olivar de Castillejo" in Madrid.)

Sweden

Swedish drama in the nineties*Claes Peter Hellwig and Niklas Brunius*

The theatre in Sweden witnessed a period of unprecedented expansion and development during the seventies and the eighties, gaining ground geographically and otherwise. Theatre attendance increased and sectors of the population which had never before been to the theatre could experience live performances. The last few years, however, have seen a drop in both the number of plays produced and the number of companies producing theatre. Unfortunately, this has been accompanied by a drop in audience attendance. It seems that although the audience has diversified, people tend to go to fewer performances. The corresponding loss in ticket sales is noticeable. While the total number of plays opening has not markedly decreased, the number of these productions opening on the large stages most certainly has.

The following figures, from a study carried out in 1991, will give an idea of audience size and the relative percentage of productions of Swedish drama as opposed to translations of foreign plays. These figures are still relevant today.

Theatre for adult audiences

	number of plays	performances audience given	(in thousands)
Swedish	489	14,889	3.258
English	54%	50%	31%
other languages	18%	29%	46%
	28%	21%	23%

Youth and children's theatre

	number of plays	performances audience given	(in thousands)
Swedish	306	14.184	1.312
English	87%	88%	84%
other languages	5%	5%	7%
	8%	7%	9%

The relatively high percentage of drama translated from English, higher still if you consider audience percentages, can largely be attributed to the preponderance of English and American musicals on the commercial stages and to the many productions of English comedies and farces.

Youth and children's theatre in Sweden

Swedish drama clearly dominates in the area of youth and children's theatre and it is here that much that is new and experimental in dramatic writing can be found. After a short period during which new playwrights had largely abandoned children's theatre, the trend has reversed. Some of the most vital and exciting dramatic literature today is written for young audiences.

It should be mentioned that children's theatre is highly developed in Sweden, with separate companies linked to some of the larger state and municipal theatres. Backa Teater at Göteborgs Stadsteater, Unga Klara at Stockholm Stadsteater and Unga Riks at Riksteatern are some examples. At the regional level, children's theatre also flourishes in separate ensembles: Byteatern's in Kalmar, Älvsborgsteatern in Borås, Sigurdteatern in Västerås, Skottes Musikteater in Gävle, to name a few. A sizeable number of small independent companies are responsible for almost half the youth and children's theatre produced in Sweden. They often attempt new Swedish drama and the results can be exceptional as in the case of Musikteatergruppen Oktober, Dockteatern Tittut and Teater Pero. There are also, of course, less successful examples.

Besides Staffan Göthe, an acknowledged master of the genre, Staffan Westerberg, Börje Lindström, Ingegerd Monthan, Eva Ström and Thomas Tidholm should all be counted among the established playwrights in the field of youth and children's theatre. Many plays in this large body of work could successfully be adapted and produced outside Sweden. Dealing primarily with school and home environments, their appeal for a young audience extends beyond the national boundaries.

New Swedish drama

The deplorable overall economic situation and, more specifically, the deteriorating economic conditions facing the larger state and municipal theatres, has greatly affected the production of new Swedish plays. Staging a new, Swedish, full length play can be quite expensive, indeed very expensive, when compared to the cost of producing, for example a classic or a new foreign play in translation.

One can only be impressed by the fact that so many theatres still persist in producing new Swedish work. For this we can thank the audiences, who prefer Swedish work and specifically new dramatic writing.

The regional theatre in Jönköping is one theatre that has made significant investments in promoting new Swedish drama, partly by organizing playwriting workshops for local dramatists and partly by inviting young Swedish playwrights to write for their theatre. Productions of the resulting plays often enjoy an enthusiastic response from the local audience.

Uppsala Stadsteater, which for a six-year period played exclusively Swedish drama, classic and modern, also invested in the production of new Swedish plays.

Norrbottnesteatern, Sweden's northernmost regional theatre have for many years encouraged the production of plays written locally, but has also commissioned works from other Swedish playwrights.

The municipal theatres of Stockholm and Göteborg have often staged new works and are responsible for several successes in promoting new playwrights. Along with The Royal Dramatic Theatre, which has promoted readings and productions of new Swedish plays, they fill this role which falls naturally to the nation's three largest theatres. As is to be expected, these theatres usually work with our most established playwrights, but they also take on many younger ones.

It is likely that high production costs will make co-production on many new productions necessary in the future. This trend towards cooperation will certainly involve Riksteatern in collaboration with other producers of new Swedish drama. This would mean that original productions would reach a larger portion of the country's population by going on tour. In this Sweden follows an international tendency.

One negative result of this trend is that new works will be given fewer performances and consequently won't benefit from more frequent meetings with directors and actors. Here we see both a positive and a negative result of the harder economic climate.

Regional investment in summer theatre has provided opportunities for Swedish playwrights throughout this past decade. Events in local history often form the focus of these productions and it is not uncommon to engage professional help in writing and directing. The acting is often done by local amateurs, and the meeting between professionals and amateurs often acts as a creative stimulant. This type of theatre has gained in popularity and as many as thirty to forty-five examples of this kind of play may be staged in any given season.

The older playwrights and their younger counterparts

The older, more established playwrights continue to dominate the Swedish repertoire, but new developments can be seen here too. With *Tupilak*, Per Olov Engquist moves away from the historical drama with which he is often associated towards a fresher, more stringent modern drama.

Lars Norén is the most played Swedish playwright, and he has been so for the past two decades. His finely tuned psycho-social incursions into the Swedish middle-class have won him a substantial audience, but have not made his family portraits excessively popular. Norén's plays have become more political in the past years and now contain direct criticisms of our society. The obsequious behaviour and obscure motivations which characterize earlier plays have given way to a naked and more desperate search for identity. In his latest work, like *A Kind of Hades*, he tends towards blackness and uses a fragmented, almost cinematic structure, far different from his earlier tendencies towards the "well-made play".

Staffan Göthe is unequalled as a humorist describing small town residents and the demolition of the welfare state. Loved for his sharp portrayals of a simpler life in the fifties, his later drama has become, to the disappointment of some of his fans, more direct, disillusioned and European. Jonas Gardell (*Cheek to Cheek*, *People in the Sun*) and Barbro Smeds (*Mars or the Spies of Love*, *The Climber's Red Ears*) write scathing and humorous portraits of contemporary Sweden.

Poets, such as Kristina Lugn and Bodil Malmsten, have revealed the comic side to modern society in their plays, but most of all have opened the doors to a feminine world. Stig Larsson, one of our most controversial playwrights, has renewed dramatic language with his raw and starkly realistic plays, both in the theatre (*Sisters and Brothers*) and on television (*The Hog*). Magnus Dahlström has created a modern mythology around a workplace with his play *The Steel Mill*. Katarina Frostensson, with her

cool, strict formalism, has attracted a lot of attention with several productions of her work at The Royal Dramatic Theatre.

Signs of a revival of vision in Swedish drama come also from a young and outspoken generation of playwrights. They often write for TV, film and theatre. Although they are often weak in their sense of theatrical form, they are more articulate than the previous generation in their choice of medium.

Many write for the theatre from a real need to relate a story through live actors in front of an audience. Others work in the theatre because they find many of the nation's best directors there.

Among the most interesting younger playwrights are Kerstin Klein Perski, Erik Uddenberg, Isa Schöier, Mia Törnquist and Malin Lagerlöf-Holst.

Many of these playwrights have been educated at Dramatiska Institutet, graduating with a good knowledge of the art form. They also have many contacts, important tools for a young and talented playwright.

Swedish drama, even when portraying specifically Swedish phenomena, is very much imbued with a European spirit and is "playable" in other countries. Plays which are bound geographically or that focus on historical events, are exceptions of course.

However, even a play like Torgny Lindgren's *Malavan*, that represents a small piece of Sweden, is recognized in parts of Europe where sparse population, economic repression and centralized led government are the cornerstones of daily life. The play *Malavan* by Torgny Lindgren and Eric Åkerlund is a satire in the spirit of Gogol's *The Inspector General*. It is situated in a small township with a population of four, where for the past two decades dead citizens have been appointed to government posts, making them eligible for national and European Community subsidies.

In conclusion, it must be said that in spite of a slump in the economy and in audience figures, Sweden maintains an impressive body of qualitatively important playwrights.

Yugoslavia

Tales of the dead: contemporary drama and theatre in Yugoslavia

Aleksandra Jovičević

1. Political and Social Context

In Buddhist teaching, the realm of Shura is the place to which those who engaged themselves in the battles of this world fall after death to be condemned to eternal fighting. In most Noh plays that belong to the Shura Noh or battle pieces, the ghosts of warriors meet travelling monks. They relate to them the circumstances of their deaths and their present suffering in the realm of Shura, and are finally brought to peace by the power of the monk's prayers. In spite of many differences in the theatrical convention, the subject theme of these Noh plays bears a striking resemblance to one of the first Serbian plays written about the recent war in former Yugoslavia, *A Serbian Drama* (*Srpska drama*). It premiered in March of 1994 at Belgrade's Zvezdara Theatre, which specializes in contemporary domestic plays.

In *A Serbian Drama*, written by a prominent Yugoslav playwright Siniša Kovačević, a father goes to the frontline in Croatia in 1992 to look for his son, a missing soldier. He only finds living dead relatives from previous wars. He runs into his own father, who was killed during World War I and his brother, who was killed in World War II. Finally, when he meets his son, all six characters of the play (including a lieutenant and son's friend, a private) realize that they are all dead, along with the father, who was killed during the search without realizing it.

Perhaps this is the first play in the history of European theatre written with all dead characters, but the dead have always played a major role in the lives of Serbs. In the European tradition, only in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* do the dead exert so much influence over the living. But what is most striking about *A Serbian Drama* is the tragic irony imprinted in the fate of Serbian people. Basically, they inhabit a heroic warrior nation, the history of which counts many battles, lost and won, for its independence, which had been always glorified in oral epic poetry and history plays. Now, for the first time in their history, the Serbs were faced with accusations of conducting an aggressive and genocidal war. Long-time victims of many genocides themselves, they were blamed as being aggressors and war criminals - not an easy situation to accept for those who were not involved in the war - and weren't guilty for waging it, or at least thought they weren't.¹ This situation became even more difficult with the imposition of severe UN sanctions (30 May, 1992) and total international isolation. Thus, the remnants of Yugoslavia (made up of two leftover republics, Serbia and Montenegro) were excluded from all global realignments and all features of universal history, becoming a closed society in which a parallel history was created.²

The way everybody in Serbia has been accused, isolated and punished by the international community for war atrocities can of course in no way be as terrible and horrifying as the war was for the people of Sarajevo and Bosnia. Yet it still is an unbearable burden to carry, with many tragic consequences for future generations. The collective guilt and shame became an everyday reality to

most people of Serbia and Montenegro.³ This is even more true for intellectuals and students, who at first opposed the war in many ways (especially in 1992, but without international media attention), only to end up more isolated, misunderstood by their own people and completely shut off by the international community.⁴ Besides this, during sanctions, Yugoslavia faced something which Yugoslav economists termed the "economy of destruction" (hyperinflation, decline in production, black market, general unemployment).

In a country where only 6 percent of the population of about thirteen million has received a college education and another 6 percent is illiterate (officially, unofficially the number is almost 15 percent), the number of intellectuals and professionals of various profiles who left the country is devastating. An estimate of the brain-drain in the 1991-96 period numbers about 150,000. Following the closure of Yugoslavia, the dispersion of its people around the world amounts to a nuclear reaction. Artists, writers, scientists, engineers, physicians are now waiters, construction workers, lab assistants and technicians in South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and Australia. Only those considered luckiest managed to stay in Europe, or to find work in their professional field. The majority however, live a hard immigrant life, experiencing a sense of reverse xenophobia, hating their host country for the poor conditions of their lives. Meanwhile, in twenty years' time Serbia and Montenegro will end without human resources, devastated by economic sanctions, war and international isolation.

Finally, through the economic and nationalistic hegemonistic discourse, which was the cause of destructive processes in the society, it becomes clear that during the sanction period, Yugoslav society passed through a dramatic period of entropy of all values. This led to an increasing repression by the government apparatus, to poverty and social disparity, violence and crime, primitive nationalism, and political clashes. Naturally, under such circumstances, art and especially the theatre lost its previous vitality and importance and became completely marginalized.⁵

2. The Theatre and Drama

In most East European countries, including ex-Yugoslavia, in the past the theatre was a battleground for opposing ideas and politically subversive action, in spite of harsh censorship. Very rarely, if ever, was the theatre experienced as pure art or even entertainment. This sometimes led to an obsession with politics and a concern for serious subjects. The theatre's direct and keen handling of political issues contributed to its growing importance in social life. Following Tito's death (1980), the Yugoslav theatre in the eighties made a valuable contribution towards a climate of tolerance and self-examination. "The Yugoslav stage was an early public forum for certain issues, even before they were raised in more appropriate places - in political circles or in the media. It was the theatre - both writers and the audience, who broke certain taboos and provoked discussion of themes previously avoided in the public arena."⁶ At that time, the theatre made a significant contribution to a process of democratization.

However, when you glance down the roster of plays in Yugoslavia these days, it is hard to see any sense of being 'plugged in' to the contemporary situation. There's no continuation of this tradition. Looking at the plays produced in the last few years, one notices two major trends in the Yugoslav theatre.

The first one is towards pure entertainment and escapism, reflected in the staging of adaptations of

popular classics, movies and comic strips, such as *Alan Ford*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Lolita*, *Reservoir Dogs*, etc.

The second is towards national historic drama, which usually treats its subjects in a romantic or sentimental way. Serbian theatre has traditionally held in high esteem those playwrights who based their work on motifs from popular legends and the history of the nation. Any attempts to describe Serbia in a humorous way, to criticize it, or to unmask aspects of its mythology, have met with a hostile response in the theatre. An example of this is *Saint Sava*, written also by Siniša Kovačević, in which the Serbian saint is portrayed in a less flattering light. It triggered large riots in a Yugoslav theatre in the spring of 1990.

This also marked the beginning of several street riots and a shift in public interest away from theatre to other manifestations of social life.⁷ The theatre became completely marginalized and was replaced with various ritual ways of expressing authority, hatred, and conflict. The mass media took over real life dramas. Most political discussions were framed in the language of theatrical metaphor. In many ways this expressed how language and thinking evolved in the Yugoslav culture: euphemisms such as "global theatre game", "dress rehearsal for a total Balkan war", etc. were used almost daily, while actors in this absurdist drama (politicians, journalists, commentators and anchor people) terrorized citizens with their psychological games that were devised to dramatize even more horrifying manifestations of war.

Theatrical metaphors became the most prominent elements of their high-flown rhetoric, along with terms once used to describe Greek tragedies: "patricide", "fratricide", "genocide", etc. But that theatre offers a metaphor for war should not be a surprise. It is the most social of art forms, and invites participation, which is a basis of war psychology when it needs to mobilize a country. This can be a profoundly disturbing way of thinking because it sees war only in terms of spectacle. Supported by growing media and communications, this new and twisted theatricality values form more than content, representation more than real events. It is based upon the assumption that reality can be entirely fabricated through the manipulation of public imagery. The Yugoslav tragedy became a commodity for mass consumption, manipulation and even seduction, but rarely a protest. Therefore, it is not a surprise that lately only a few contemporary plays hesitantly show an inkling of terror and violence in the everyday life of Yugoslav society, its recent past and its crucial problems and contradictions. To this group belong three plays that premiered recently in three Belgrade theatres of national importance (Yugoslav Drama Theatre, Atelier 212, and Zvezdara Theatre). They are based on the same epic structure, covering a period of years, and with a big cast. Nevertheless, in spite of their success and their cathartic impact, they still did not break the ground for something that we can define as a trend in Yugoslav drama.

The first play, *In the Hold (U potpalublju)*, a dramatization of the novel of the same title that has been a hit translation in about twenty languages, was written by a young novelist, Vladimir Arsenijević. Set in a middle-class urban milieu, both the novel and the play deal with a lost generation born in the mid- and late-sixties. It was raised on ideas of cosmopolitanism, pop-culture and easy drugs, and was sacrificed and devastated by some higher order which they never understood. The show opened in the spring of 1996 and became a leading production, both in terms of audience and critics' reception. It received all the major awards at various festivals throughout the country, and it still plays to full houses.

Although it was staged a bit late with respect to the events of 1991 and 1992, this emotionally charged production broke many taboos and recalled recent painful memories. It caused discomfort among the older generation, whereas it offered catharsis for a confused, tormented and humiliated younger generation. It also opened the door for a new generation of Serbian playwrights, born in the early seventies, who deal with subjects like war, immigration and economic problems in an unsentimental way, and with unusual stamina, harsh street language and violence. Most of these plays were published recently and have just been discovered by theatre directors, so it is too early to speak about their impact on the stage.

The second play, *A Tour (Turneja)*, written by an acclaimed Yugoslav film and theatre director, Goran Marković, opened last autumn and is a hit with the audience too. The play deals with a group of actors who go to the war zone in Croatia to perform for the soldiers and end up in some tragic and comic situations. Although somewhat naive, this epic play brought to the fore the Serbian role in the civil war. It also focussed upon the attitudes of theatre professionals (and all artists for that matter) during the war, and on the moral responsibility of those who never question things but just continue working. Finally it deals with the relationship between theatre and society, as well as creativity and ideology.

The main characters of *A Tour*, although played by well-known actors, do not appeal to the soldiers, nor to the people caught up in the war. They're too busy with simply surviving as ordinary people, war-profiteers, or warmongers. Marković presented the actors as grown-up children who are oversensitive and lacking in reason. The actors, useless in the new circumstances, are protected by their gullibility from becoming corrupted in an atmosphere of terror. In an anticlimactic ending, the actors, who have gone through all kinds of horrors, including a terrible murder, return to their home theatre. It seems they are untouched by their experiences, thus revealing the ineptitude of the theatre in a new society where all moral high ground has been destroyed.

3. The Theatre Within Theatre

The use of the device of 'theatre within theatre', used to be very popular in the Yugoslav drama of the eighties in plays such as *The Travelling Theatre Šopalović (Putujuće pozorište Šopalović)* by Ljubomir Simović and *Croatian Faust (Hrvatski Faust)* by Slobodan Šnajder. It is also used in a third play that premiered in the fall of 1996, *Larry Thompson, Tragedy of One Youth (Lari Tomson, tragedija jedne mladosti)* written by Dušan Kovačević, perhaps the best Yugoslav comedy writer of the second half of the twentieth century. In this play, written as a postmodern pastiche mixing classical drama and absurd comedy, and directed by the author himself, all the anomalies in the Yugoslav society are magnified. This is done through the story of three couples of triplets that represent three general types of people dominant in the present society: doctors, tram drivers and TV evangelists. Its action is centred around a theatre where a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* cannot be presented because the main actor has attempted suicide.

It may seem strange that Dušan Kovačević has only now responded to the whole situation, bearing in mind his previous plays and level of his social and political engagement. Kovačević (b. 1948) emerged in the mid-seventies with three plays that were cornerstones of Yugoslav drama of the time: *The Marathons Run an Honorary Lap (Maratonci trče počasni krug, 1972)*, *Radovan III*, which premiered in 1973 and had the longest run in the history of the Yugoslav theatre, more than ten

years and was recently restaged with a different cast, and *Spring in January* (*Proleće u januaru*, 1976). They qualified him as an expert on the Serbian nation and its mentality and perhaps the only Serbian writer who was also able to expose all its shortcomings and stupidity to merciless laughter. During his mature phase, in the early eighties, Kovačević wrote two more plays, *The Gathering Place* (*Sabirni centar*, 1982) and *The Balkan Spy*, (*Balkanski špijun*, 1983). They are influenced by the theatre of the absurd and its sentence construction and play with words. Of all Serbian writers, Kovačević comes closest to the European tradition of absurdist drama, and it is not surprising that he has been translated widely, with many productions abroad. In most of his plays, including the last three, *Professional* (*Profesional ac*, 1990), *The Hilarious Tragedy* (*Urnebesna tragedija*, 1991) and *Larry Thompson*, Kovačević reflects the influence of Alfred Jarry, especially in his use of satire and slapstick. From time to time, especially in *Larry Thompson*, he shows an inclination towards self-irony found in the plays of Slavomir Mrožek, Vaclav Havel and the novels of Franz Kafka. All Kovačević's plays work like a distorting mirror: he uses classical plots (with a clear beginning, development and an ending), familiar characters and a point of view, and then develops his plays into absurd and fantastic proportions. For example, in *Marathons* the centre of action lies with a Topalovic family that specializes in the funeral business, but illegally - stealing and reselling coffins. It consists of five generations of men (who also kill their women): Maximillian who is 126 years old, his son Aksentije who is 102, grandson Milutin who is 79, great-grandson Lucky who is 44, and finally great-great grandson Mirko, who is 24. In *Larry Thompson*, the triplet Dragan, Bojan and Oliver is married to the female triplet Dragana, Bojana and Olivera - all of them are uncles and aunts to an actor, Stephan, the last offspring of the Nos (Nose) family, whose nose was its trademark and whose suicide marks the end of the whole family history.

The family is clearly a metaphor for Kovačević's basic theme: the relationship between individual and authority, and the relationship between individual and totalitarian consciousness. On a different level, the family is a mirror reflecting a society full of contradictions and deviations. Most of Kovačević's characters end up as personifications of a fascist spirit, with intolerance taking on the mantle of primitivism and barbarism. For example, in *The Balkan Spy*, a minor employee goes berserk when he tries to protect society from imagined evils. His perception of reality becomes distorted by his fanaticism and dogmatics. This is similar to *The Professional*, least absurdist of all Kovačević's plays, which depicts the relationship between a writer and a police inspector who specializes in following the writer.

4. Translation and Interpretation

All Kovačević's plays have been translated into English, French and German, as well as in the languages of neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, and Rumania), including ex-Yugoslav republics. In addition, according to data gathered by the Documentation Center of Sterijino pozorje in Novi Sad (founded in 1965), Dušan Kovačević is the most performed Yugoslav author abroad. His plays, especially *The Professional*, have been performed throughout important theatres in both the Czech and Slovak Republics, Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, Great Britain, Germany, and the United States. They were done by both fringe and mainstream theatres, for example the Städtische Bühnen in Nuernberg, Germany which performed *Der Profi* in 1992. The universal theme of *The Professional*,

its simple language and structure, the small cast and few stage requirements, qualified this play for successful international production.

Of all other Yugoslav playwrights, only Ljubomir Simović, a well-known poet and playwright of Serbian origin, has reached a certain measure of international success. His play *The Travelling Theatre* Šopalović (1985) was performed in the Czech and Slovak Republics, as well as in two French cities, Paris and Valreas. The production staged at Herisson Theatre of Paris by the troupe 'Les Federes' in France was proclaimed the best production by critics in the 1991-'92 season. Part of the international appeal of this play perhaps lies in the fact that of all Serbian plays it comes closest to what you might call poetic reality. It starts simply as a realistic play and ends up as a symbolist one. It depicts a group of third-rate strolling players who arrive in a provincial Serbian town during the German occupation to give a performance of Schiller's *Die Räuber*. The local people don't like the humble actors and the occupying authorities and their stooges are suspicious of them. The actors, innocent as they are, remain above the everyday reality and are able to instill a touch of humanity even in the worst situation. An actor, taken by his romantic role (theatre for him is stronger than life and he always quotes from classics) rises to the status of a hero when his playful gesture is interpreted as an act of resistance. "Under the circumstances of Simović's play, the inadequacies of the theatre become its advantages, almost its virtues." (Klaič, 1986, 15) This play has reached a French audience through the publishing house, 'L'Age d'homme' in Lausanne. Its owner, Vladimir Dimitrijević, is also the play's translator.

A meagre production of plays has produced only a meagre international promotion of Yugoslav drama. There are only few means through which Yugoslav drama is presented to the world theatre community. The problem with Yugoslav drama is not that the most important works have not been translated. On the contrary, they have been translated and retranslated. It is possible that these plays never rise above local issues. Also their language and the historical references might be too complicated, to non-Yugoslavs. In Yugoslavia, the theatre is generally seen as a place of consultation and work, where society can examine its language and actions. Thus, to do the opposite or something different to the actions considered acceptable and normal, in short, to challenge social norms and taste, has always had considerable political importance.

If the theatre is indeed the laboratory of the deeds and words of society, then a translation should be both the preserver of the original form and an adversary of communication, which is rarely the case. Besides this, there is also the problem of the "greater" and "lesser" languages. One does not translate from or into a lesser language in the same manner as into or from a greater language. These are political factors. The problem of translation is not just technical: it is also linked to historical values, local problems and interests, which usually remain opaque when translated. Furthermore, no professional organizations promote the work of Yugoslav playwrights in other countries. Each author is left on his own to find promotional agencies or agents to represent him abroad. This usually happens if the author has been already successfully translated and produced, which is rarely the case. Usually, these plays are presented through word of mouth, through personal contacts of writers and thanks to the mediation of Yugoslav immigrants interested in presenting Yugoslav culture outside its borders.

In the last twenty years, the only Yugoslav theatre quarterly, *Scena*, has made continuous but isolated attempts at translating the best Yugoslav plays and publishing them annually in English. Typically, the criteria are the theatrical and literary merits of the works, i.e. the place they occupy in

the history of Yugoslav drama; the general nature of their content with respect to the context of European drama; and the interest they may have for foreign readers. The translations are followed by some basic information on the dramatic tradition to which the author belongs; his biography; the social climate in which the plays originated, notes and critics' interpretations, and a list of the most successful productions. Yet, according to the editorial staff of *Scena*, nobody has ever contacted them about the copyrights of any of the plays. It must be emphasized that translators of the plays are not professional theatre translators and do not think of plays in terms of their future *mise-en-scene*, or of the situation that when one stages the original, one also stages its translation. Translators are sometimes recruited among Yugoslavs who live abroad (Vladimir Dimitrijević and Christina Pribičević) or among visiting professors of various languages at Yugoslav universities. Before the last war, Yugoslav plays from different republics and in different languages were published throughout the world (see the bibliography). Yugoslav classical plays, by Jovan Sterija Popović, Branislav Nušić, and Aleksandar Popović have mostly been translated and performed in Slavic countries and sometimes in the German language area. These plays were also successfully translated and staged in all Yugoslav republics. There was a tremendous amount of theatrical exchange between Yugoslav republics. But the Yugoslav theatre we once knew, the one that symbolized the multinational, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural Yugoslav domain and which encouraged the exchange of plays, productions and actors, does not exist any longer. Gone are the repertory theatres founded by actors from all over Yugoslavia, such as the KPGT (its acronym standing for the first letter of the word "theatre" in four Yugoslav languages: Croatian "Kazalište", Serbian "Pozorište", Slovene "Gledališče", and Macedonian "Teater") and the Yugoslav Drama Theatre; the theatre companies of ethnic minorities (the Gypsy troupe Pralipe or Turkish drama) or theatre productions based on the languages and cultures of Yugoslavia (Goran Stefanovski's *Hi-Fi*, *Bloody Mary*, *The Tower of Babylon*, and all KPGT's productions); the theatre festivals throughout the country, both national and international, that encouraged the exchange of ideas and productions (Sterijino pozorje in Novi Sad, the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, EuroKaz in Zagreb, Sarajevo's Festival of Small and Experimental Stages, KPGT's YU-Fest); the Yugoslav environmental theatre with productions staged in various cities, parks, lakes, fortresses, squares and streets; several art and drama schools, whose faculty and students came from all over the country; as well as joint publications of books and journals: they no longer exist, are gone forever, or have been isolated to their republics of origin. Even if such an exchange remained between some ex-Yugoslav republics, Serbia and Montenegro have been completely excluded.⁸

The theatre in Yugoslavia that was once 100 percent subsidized by government now faces a major crisis due to the increasingly inadequate subsidies. In spite of high theatre attendance (i.e. last year, a study showed that more than 500,000 people visited the theatre in Belgrade, more than one third of its population), because of low ticket prices and high costs, repertory theatres are hardly earning money. As mentioned earlier, most popular pieces are domestic melodramas, vaudevilles and farces because they offer a sense of pure escapism, without traces of politics and war.⁹ The number of these productions is rampantly increasing, influencing the work of repertory theatres, who are also looking for ways to cash in.

According to official statistics, in the 1994-95 season there were 403 theatre premieres in Yugoslavia: 137 plays were presented for the first time, 266 were reruns, 209 plays were by

domestic authors and 194 by foreign writers and 4,470 performances were attended by 1,0266,627 people.¹⁰ According to recent statistics in 1996 most plays produced were based on foreign classics, about 40 percent of the total repertoire. Lately all theatres have the same eclectic profile and look alike, except Zvezdara and Kult which insist on strictly contemporary domestic plays.¹¹ Second place is taken by contemporary domestic plays, which usually make up 20 percent of what's on offer in the regular repertory theatres throughout the country. This is perhaps the first time in the history of Yugoslav theatre that it does not rely on national drama to attract theatergoers. About 20 percent of the repertoire is made up of contemporary foreign plays, usually commercial hits from Broadway or the West End. Finally, least popular are domestic classics which make up four to ten percent of each repertoire. However, in the National Theatre in Belgrade almost half the repertoire is made up of new plays on historical themes.¹²

When one looks at the statistics, one immediately notices a large craving for domestic plays, which usually survive more than a hundred performances. The most popular ones even reach more than two hundred performances over the years. Some productions are restaged and have as much large an audience as when they first came out, e.g. *Radovan III* and *The Travelling Theatre Šopalović*. Most actors work on the side and perform in commercial productions, in which producers put three or four people in the cast, usually major stars, and rehearse quickly. The productions do not have any technical requirements and are simple to stage anywhere and easy to tour around the country. Without costs for bureaucratic overhead and with tickets at slightly higher prices than in repertory theatres, these people are earning big amounts of money. It is more profitable for these actors to do this kind of production than to make movies, or work in their home repertory theatres, where they sometimes refuse the roles offered.

Perhaps the biggest problem of Yugoslav theatre is that there are no regulations to control who invests money in the theatre, and how. Sometimes it is the Ministry of Culture, sometimes the Open Society Fund of Yugoslavia/ Soros Foundation, and sometimes private and state companies. There are many productions without a clear sense of movement and aesthetics. As mentioned before, the major theatre houses in Yugoslavia switched to the same kind of repertoires as these improvised companies. Because they refuse to deal with any of the current social, cultural and political problems and encourage audiences to accept the current situation as it is, these productions are very harmful to the theatre - even worse than no theatre at all. Unfortunately, after thirty years of BITEF and twenty years of KPGT, there seems to be a void in experimental and avant-garde theatre.¹³ No theatre in Yugoslavia today tries to unmask political issues and denounce the poor and questionable politics of its government.

As is clear from the preceding examples, politics in Yugoslavia have become an essential force in people's lives. To avoid politics means to fail to interpret both the world we live in and our fate in it. The mission of Yugoslav theatre should be to rediscover such interpretation. The ethical weakness of the times should point the theatre towards new forms of expression. We need a more innovative point of view, broader in its comprehension than the present Balkan fragmentation which interests no one except the Yugoslavs. The theatre as it is in Yugoslavia will certainly not succeed if it uses the existing values and criteria and will be condemned to its present narrowness and stagnation. These will only deepen its crisis and further weaken its position in society. The theatre's only source of strength lies in the artistic dignity of its reaction to the crisis which surrounds it.

Notes

- 1 For example, see Lawrence Wescheler's article 'Aristotle in Belgrade', published in 'The New Yorker', on February 10, 1997 in which he criticizes Serbs for not being ready to accept collective responsibility.
- 2 Following the peace agreement in Dayton, Ohio on November 21, 1996, the process of easing and gradual lifting of sanctions has slowly begun.
- 3 This guilt has been little bit diminished lately thanks to the citizens' and students' protests against the stolen votes in the recent local elections in the winter of 1996/1997. 'Contrary to the picture presented in the West during the war, Mr Milosevic has been faced with democratic-minded opposition since he came to power. This opposition now comprises the three parties whose coalition slates won the votes in all of Serbia's major cities last month (November). It was Mr Milosevic's attempt to annul those elections that triggered the current protests in Belgrade and in more than 30 cities and towns across Serbia.' (Vladimir Arsenijevic, 'Belgrade's Philosophers of Freedom', Op-Ed, *The New York Times*, Monday, December 30, 1996, A15)
- 4 In fact, the demonstrations of 1996/1997 are the continuation of the protests by students and opposition politicians in 1991 and 1992 for prevention and stopping the civil war. For example, when Vukovar and the area around Dubrovnik were shelled, people protested by lighting candles every night in front of the Parliament. When Sarajevo was shelled, about 40,000 people or more unfurled a black 'band of mourning' through the length of Belgrade's main boulevard. Such peaceful actions were numberless and passed almost unnoticed by international community.
- 5 For the state of Yugoslav art see Dejan Sretenovic, 'Art in a Closed Society', in *Art in Yugoslavia, 1992-1995*, Dejan Sretenovic, ed., Belgrade: Center for contemporary Arts and B92, 1996
- 6 Dragan Klaic, 'Obsessed with Politics: currents in Yugoslav Drama', *Scena*, Novi Sad, English Issue No. 9, 1986, 15
- 7 For example, the students's protest of 1992 became a subject theme of only one play, *Tamna je noc (Dark is the Night)* that premiered a few months after the protest in the fall of 1992 in a small, chamber theatre that also specializes in contemporary domestic plays, Kult theatre. The play was written by Aleksandar Popovic (1933 - 1996), a major Yugoslav playwright and representative of Yugoslav avant-garde theatre of the sixties. Although Popovic specialized in comedies of absurd, this play could be considered one of the most classical, if not conventional realistic dramas, centering around a story of a Belgrade's family whose children got involved into students' protest and with one of them being send off to war to come back crippled. But the play, directed by Egon Savin, had a cathartic impact on everyone who saw it. Of all Popovic's plays it had a major commercial success and opened a way for a revival of some of his earlier pieces (*The Development of Bora*, *The Tailor*, *Ljubinko* and *Desanka*, etc.) and his new pieces that were not so successful, audience and critic wise (*Carlama s bogom* and *Bas-bunar*). *Dark is the Night* had a strictly local importance and was full of topical humor. The play was also shown at the La Mama Theatre in New York the spring of 1994 but was not welcomed and understood as in Belgrade, where its performances were sold out months in advance and where people went to see it many times, recognizing their own personal history.

- ⁸ This exchange, however, remained on individual level, through exchange of plays and directors, i.e. Dusan Jovanovic's plays *Antigone* and *Enigma Courage* have been produced by KPGT in Subotica and Belgrade in May 1994 and November 1995, respectively; a play by Macedonian playwright Dejan Dukovski, *A Powder keg*, directed by Macedonian director Slobodan Unkovski, produced at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Fall of 1995 has been a major hit and international success (the production was presented at the Bonner Playwrights Festival last year) and in Italy. In the case of Nenad Prokic, a Serbian playwright and dramaturg this collaboration works in the opposite direction. Prokic's dramatization of Dante's *La Divina Commedia*, his plays *Russian Mission* and *The Tower of Babylon* have been staged by Tomas Pandur, a Slovene director at the Mladinsko Gledalisce in Maribor, Slovenia and at Graz's Schauspielhaus in Austria and were shown throughout Europe. 'Theater Heute' also proclaimed Prokic's play, *Metastable Grail* (also placed within a theatre) as the best play in foreign language in 1985.
- ⁹ These are plays that bears titles such as *Love Letter* (*Ljubavno pismo*, 1993) and/or *In the Flame of Passion* (*U plamenu strasti*, 1996) intended as a parody of extremely popular domestic TV soap operas. However, there are few plays which stands out from the genre uniformity, i.e. *An Easy Piece* (*Laki komad*, 1993) written by Nebojsa Romcevic (1962) who belongs to the younger generation of Yugoslav playwrights and who likes to experiment within the genres. Written in a form of classical vaudeville, this play is loaded with farcical humor, which was sometimes too harsh for the audience to accept. It turned out that *An Easy Piece* was not easy at all because it deals with the legacy of communist fathers to their incapable and nationally and politically confused sons. It is based on a story of an aggressive and violent communist general and his meek son. Under the influence of his wife, the son kills his father and covers his body with a concrete, thus making him look like an abstract sculpture placed in the midst of a living room. The son disguises himself into his father (both roles were played by the same actor, Slobodan Ninkovic) and that becomes a premise for a number of errors and mismatches, unveiling the family's and society's hypocrisy.
- ¹⁰ *Godisnjak jugoslovenskih pozorista* (*Annals of Yugoslav Theatre*) 92/93 and 94/95, Novi Sad: Sterijino pozorje, 1996
- ¹¹ Data gathered by Ivan Medenica, teaching assistant at the School of Drama, University of Arts in Belgrade, for 'The Reform or Transition: the Future of Repertory theatre in Central and Eastern Europe' workshop held in Prague, in November 21-24, 1996, and organized by Open society Institute and fund, New York and Prague, and Archa Theatre, Prague and Theatre Institute Netherlands, Amsterdam.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Nonetheless, KPGT still exists and works in Belgrade, ruled by his founder Ljubisa Ristic, who coordinates 120 actors, directors, and writers who work in an abandoned sugar-factory, in an environment of experimentation, lack of funds and small audience attendance. Last year they had more than twenty openings that do not figure in the statistics.

Colophon

Culture in Balance: Texts Crossing Borders
organized by Theater Instituut Nederland,
European Cultural Month Ljubljana,
Vlaams Theater Instituut

Editorial Committee: Rudy Engelder, Dragan Klaic, Dennis Meyer
Editor: Rob Klinkenberg
DTP: Deirdre Roovers
Production: Agatha Regeer, Klavdija Zupan, Dennis Meyer

Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
tel.: +31 20 551 33 00
fax: +31 20 551 33 03
email: tinresearch@gn.apc.org

European Cultural Month Ljubljana
Copova 14
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
tel.: +386 61 126 4108
+386 61 121 1140
fax: +386 61 217 037
+386 61 121 1144
email: emk97.ljubljana@siol.net

Vlaams Theater Instituut
Square Sainctelette 19
1210 Brussels
Belgium
tel.: +32 2 20 10 906
fax: +32 2 20 30 205
email: vti@ecna.org

Mission Statements

Theater Instituut Nederland

The objective of Theater Instituut Nederland is to make a significant contribution to the knowledge of and opinion about the Dutch theatre culture in an international context.

The Instituut provides information, conducts research, initiates debate, stimulates reflection in relation to the needs and interests of professional theatre and its present and future audiences.

The Instituut houses a museum and a library, collects current information and documentation, and organizes events such as discussions, conferences, workshops, exhibitions and international presentations. It publishes books, cds and other materials and participates in various international networks.

European Cultural Month Ljubljana

On the 17th of June 1994, the Council of the European Union (Culture) decided to entrust the European Cultural month project to the city of Ljubljana in 1997.

The European Cultural Month Ljubljana 1997 presents contemporary Slovenian creativity in all its richness and at the same time calls attention to important achievements from our past. An important part of the programme comprises guest appearances by outstanding foreign artists, not only high-profile artists from neighbouring countries but also from all other European countries. Naturally the basic principle of the project is recognition and understanding of the creativity of European nations. Between May 15 and July 5 there are various international competitions, seminars, exhibitions and symposiums.

All this means that for forty-five days Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia experiences the pulse of the whole Europe.

Vlaams Theater Instituut

The Vlaams theater Instituut is a centre for theatrical research, documentation, advice and promotion. Working with a broad definition of its own field of activity, the Vlaams Theater Instituut understands 'theatre' to mean all manifestations of the performing arts with the exception of music.

The goal of the Vlaams Theater Instituut is to promote the optimal functioning of all levels and aspects of the dramatic arts. The Instituut contributes to the knowledge of the professional theatre in and outside Flanders, provides insight into its workings and encourages the formation of opinion. With that goal in mind, the Vlaams Theater Instituut organizes debates, conferences, publishes books and newsletters, stimulates international contacts and carries out applied research. The Vlaams Theater Instituut collects documentary materials and distributes the information through its own documentation and information department. In addition, it attempts to increase the expertise of producers and others involved in the theatre by offering goal-oriented advice and taking the initiative in setting up workshops, conferences and other kinds of encounters.