

CULTURE IN BALANCE - TEXTS CROSSING BORDERS

Ljubljana, June 26 - 29, 1997

Boekmansichting - Bibliotheek
Herengracht 415
1017 BP Amsterdam
Tel. 6243739

Thursday, June 26

10.15 - 11.00

Hey, you, can you hear me?

Playwrights in small linguistic areas

Chair: Ann Olaerts (Belgium)

Speakers: Judith Herzberg (The Netherlands), Goran Stefanovski (Macedonia)
and Haukur Ólafur Símonarson (Iceland)

The participants of the conference were greeted by **Ruud Engelder** from Theater Instituut Nederland. He pointed out that the whole event was carefully prepared, but that its outcome would solely depend on the engagement of the participants and their desire and motivation to tackle the important question regarding the subject. He invited the participants to use this rare opportunity of being gathered in such a large number, and create as many mutual contacts as possible. Engelder also warned that this exceptional situation comprised the fact that all the people were bound to use the common language, English, and that only a handful of participants were the native speakers. He pledged therefore for patience and understanding for all those whose command of English was not as perfect. Engelder emphasized that the topics schedule was flexible enough to allow any suggestions or changes. Yet, one thing remained unchanged, and that was the fact that the participants shared the common interest in dealing with the problem of theatre and, more specifically, drama written in "smaller", "lesser known" languages and the question of their wider promotion and distribution. Finally, Engelder thanked the European Cultural Month of Ljubljana for its effort in organizing this event. He then opened the first session of the conference, giving the word to the first chair, **Ann Olaerts**.

Having three well known playwrights as the speakers for this session, Olaerts suggested two topics for their exposes: what was their interest in working internationally and, secondly, what were the problems - if any - of writing in a "minor" language area. She invited **Haukur Ólafur Símonarson** as the representative of the smallest nation at the conference, yet the one with an incredibly high theatre attendance, to address those topics first.

Símonarson referred to the demographic facts about Iceland, namely, the number of its inhabitants, which was a mere 260.000. It might not be easy to understand that a society of this size could have serious ambitions, but Símonarson stated that he, as a playwright, found it highly satisfying to live in such a society. Each play that he wrote was staged in the theatre, to the average attendance of 40.000. Of course, not all playwrights in Iceland have such success. Yet, there is another phenomenon untypical for other countries: people are buying published plays. The number of sold copies varies

from 300 to 1500. Finally, to round up this astonishing data one should add the figure of the average annual theatre attendance, which equals the number of inhabitants and is 260.000!

On the other hand, a playwright writing in a language from a small linguistic area has great difficulties in presenting his work abroad. As far as Icelandic plays are concerned, it is hard to even find good translators. There are no literary agents and no theatre publishers. Símonarson personally didn't feel any frustration because his works were not presented in world metropolises; he even admitted that he did very little for their promotion anyway, simply because he was so busy writing and producing plays in his homeland. Still, he was fully aware of the necessity for creating a platform which would enable playwrights from minor language areas to present their works in a wider context. That was the subject of one of the meetings of the ITI's Playwrights' Committee in which Símonarson took part. He reported that the conclusion of that meeting was that the booming of Internet should be used as the basis for promotion and distribution of plays. Also, a soon-to-be occurrence of software which would enable rough translations of literary works could be an immensely helpful tool in this endeavour. So, for writers as Símonarson himself, who write in "small" languages and live in a society without the blessings of literary agents and publishers, the solution might simply be to go on the Net. The Nordic countries are already preparing a databank containing such information.

Símonarson pointed out that there were a few people willing to read plays, especially the ones that were not already successfully promoted. Amidst the chronic lack of curiosity and enthusiasm the case of the Festival of contemporary European Drama, known as Bonner Biennale, and the brave people who formed it is truly exceptional. Bonner Biennale offers the opportunity to playwrights to see their plays in a new social and cultural context which gives them new insight into their works: what is peripheral and special as opposed to what is universally shared by all people. Bonner Biennale also shows that there is an interest for plays coming from non-Anglo-Saxon areas.

Simonarson concluded the first part of his speech by stating that playwrights were bad businessmen. They are often lonely, depressed people fighting their shyness and gloom by writing cheerfully about their hates, loves and fears. In Iceland, people are serious about theatre and literature for one good reason: there would be no independent Icelandic nation without those gloomy shy writers. Literature was always at the center of survival of the nation. It was never written for commercial reasons. It is perhaps because of that that some of the best works of world literature were written in "small" languages. "We are all kings and queens on the island", Símonarson ended, "and we all feel like 260.000.000 depressed poets."

The Dutch playwright **Judith Herzberg** gave a brief overview of the genesis of contemporary Dutch drama which coincided with the beginning of her playwrighting career. It was due to Jan Kassies that she started writing for theatre. He was the overall initiator of the occurrence of Dutch drama. That was at the beginning of 60's when there were hardly any Dutch plays and the majority of theatre repertoires consisted of plays written in English: Pinter, Albee, Miller. Herzberg remembered how Kassies clearly stated: "We don't have any cocktail parties in Holland; why should we then do a play called 'Cocktail Party'?". In the meantime, Kassies founded the Institute of the Research of the Dutch Theatre with the idea to transpose personal and local ambiance onto the stage. Herzberg herself was practically commissioned to write her first play. She therefore expressed her belief that a writer should always write for his/her local

audience, for the people and the circumstances one was familiar with. If one started aiming at larger audience, one would lose one's own specificity. That is why Herzberg found the idea of rough translation of the plays on Internet which Símonarson explained before somewhat frightening; plays are not about rough translations, she stated, and in that way people would start looking for plots or messages, and that is something that should be avoided. She also thought that it was not the job of playwrights to work on the promotion of their works but the task for the curious audience.

To Olaert's question on what was her experience with having plays performed abroad, Herzberg explained that she had a competent agent in Berlin who chose carefully the companies to which she gave Herzberg's plays and much in accordance with Herzberg's preferences. Still, it happened that some productions were done to her dislike. This especially concerned Israel, Herzberg's part-time residence site, where due to vast cultural differences her plays were almost without exception misconstrued. In spite of her willingness to create the contact with the other context, her kind of humor found no resonance with the Israeli audience.

Herzberg also shared her experience in writing a play in three different languages: English, Hebrew and German. It happened that a group of young Israeli theatre people had an offer from a theater in Erlangen, Germany to do a joint project with the Jewish people of the third generation after the war, the Germans and the Israelis. They invited Herzberg to write a play for the project. Although she had collaborated with this group previously and to her satisfaction, she refused adamantly such a proposal on pretext that it was high time to stop the revivals of past confrontations, adding that she would rather do a play on dog breeders than on such a subject. It turned out that dog-breeding was not all that far from the Jewish-German complex, so she ended up writing a play on a dog-breeders' conference between Israelis and Germans. In the play, their common language was English but among themselves they spoke either German or Hebrew, which made in turn the members of the other group angry, and that was the main wheel of action. So, the play which was all about dogs actually spoke on the language problems, cultural and historical heritage. Its framework also provided Herzberg an opportunity to talk about racism without getting too serious. She added one more curiosity: the play was later produced in Holland, where it was all translated in Dutch and yet wasn't deprived of its original intention!

Macedonian playwright **Goran Stefanovski** used Julia Kristeva's statement that everybody had two languages as the basis for exploration of his, in many ways, unique living and creative situation of one who commuted between two countries and two cultural contexts, of one who wrote in two languages. In Stefanovski's case, the first language was his mother tongue, Macedonian, the language of lullabies of his childhood, the language that was given to him. In his teens, though, he chose English as the language in which he wanted to express himself. According to Kristeva, every person chooses the other language in their life, usually with the first adrenaline rush and identity crisis. It is by definition the language which embodies social prestige and sexual desire. The entire Third World is yearning to be English, said Stefanovski, to merge with the First World, the land of Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Michael Jackson and the Top 20 hits. English is therefore the language that provides the entrance to the global level, to the top of the world. Such drive towards "the otherness" has often been an effective literary tool: Tolstoy's characters start speaking French when they want to be their better selves; the same goes for Yugoslav writer Miroslav Krleža's heroes who use German as means to perfection. But, in which language do the English-speaking

youngsters project their teenage dreams of ideal self? When Stefanovski asked his British friends that question, the answer was swift: "Naturally, we dream American!"

Stefanovski further contemplated upon the possibilities of bridging between the mother tongue and other languages. One solution might be what Simonarson proposed: one shouldn't bother with it, simply write one's own plays and let the bridge-makers do their job. Still, Stefanovski warned, in Macedonia as in every place in the world that suffers from this virus, the main nationalistic dictum was that one's language was one's homeland. How do the bilingual, bi-homeland people fit in then? Driven by his everyday life experience, Stefanovski is actively dealing with possibilities of marrying or, rather, merging those two streams. His latest play, that was commissioned in London, is a remake of the famous Michael Curtiz' film "Casablanca". In Stefanovski's version, it is called "Casabalkan" and it takes place in the Balkans amidst the atrocities of the civil war.

In connection with this issue, Stefanovski stressed one important point: playwrights do pay allegiances to their own languages, but they pay allegiances to something else as well, which is the language of drama beyond the linguistic area. Stefanovski reminded that one of the finest dramatists of all times, Charles Chaplin, created a superior dramatic language without a single word. He also reminded that the suffix "wright" in the word "playwright" was an old English word which didn't mean "to write", but "to make". In other words, playwrights make plays, not write them. That is why Stefanovski believes that the building of the play, its structure, is what makes the play viable, and not its linguistic side.

Concluding his speech, Stefanovski humorously pointed out that this whole discussion on "small" language-cultures and their protection happened under the umbrella of English as Lingua Franca. Good knowledge of English is the imperative for anyone who wants to have a voice on any issue, even if it is the preservation of "small" linguistic cultures.

Judith Herzberg remarked that those who wrote in a smaller language might have a lesser horizon. Getting back to her personal experience with her plays not finding their proper context in Israel, she speculated that the reason for that might be that Israel dealt with much bigger problems than Holland did. Theatre in Israel has a very strong social and political mark, everything is geared towards actuality. This comprises also a different style of acting. Israelis are much less interested in the stage interpretation of personal relationships. This experience brought Herzberg to a thought that real borders were not between language zones, but between problems typical for one country and not for another one. Problems are, it seems, much harder to translate than languages.

In **Simonarson's** opinion, it is very important for an author to have the opportunity to see his work in a different context. Yet, theatre is a local thing and it is therefore difficult to "transplant" it to another culture. This, naturally, doesn't apply to all theatre genre as, for instance, the commercial, plot-driven theatre. Such theatre could easily find its place within the realm of Internet and multimedia. For Simonarson, the basis of theatre is a good story, not necessarily told with words. Theatre is also a physical thing that takes place in a short time-span and among living people. One cannot just pack it in cans and sell it abroad.

Ann Olaerts returned to the question of social-political-historical context as a determinant of the spirit of theatre plays, noting that dramatic literature in those countries with turbulent and turmoiled quest for identity - including her native Flanders - bore a striking stamp of this history. She suggested to the speakers to reflect

upon this topic, to both its stimulating and jeopardizing aspects.

Goran Stefanovski made a fierce critic of the Macedonian government, mainly of its practice of applying for financial help everywhere in the world and thus building its politics on foreign credits and, on the other hand, ardently propagating the preservation of "pure national spirit, culture, language...". Those were the people that talked about "the genetic essence of Macedonian language and culture". Stefanovski remarked that such thinking was only a step away from a further step called "ethnic cleansing" of which we were all witnesses in the last years at the Balkans. To those people, the concept of multiculturalism or, as Stefanovski put it, "cultural mongrelity", was something inconceivable and dangerous. The irony lay in the fact that, while living in such conditions as a human being was difficult, all of these circumstances were God's given gift to a playwright - in other words, a marvelous and rich writing material.

Judith Herzberg added on her part that there was a multitude of things in Holland that dissatisfied her and enraged her - as, for instance, petty corruption among the employees of various institutions, or any of the big economical and civilizational contradictions in dealing with problems such as epidemics, etc. But, as much as those things affected her way of thinking and perceiving, she couldn't take them as viable dramatic material; for one thing, she wouldn't want to be didactic. She also suggested that the discussion should be directed towards exploring the disadvantages and losses that occurred when transposing one theatre play into a different context rather than its benefits and gains.

Simonarson noted that environmental issues were certainly one of the crucial topics to deal with in our time. In his play "The Sea", he himself has written on the problem of the fish stock in the ocean around Iceland which was the main economical and environmental issue of the country. But, when the text was supposed to be staged in Canada, he encountered a different view and attitude regarding the same problem. Whereas his conclusion was that it was the greed that was destroying the fish stock and that a reorganization of the private ownership in fishing industry was necessary, the Canadians felt that the issue of fishing was more of a personal endeavour and that the emphasis on greed and private ownership was not corresponding to their vision of the problem.

Goran Stefanovski returned to the more global view on the whole subject of the conference. He stated that, unfortunately for most of us and fortunately for some of us, we lived in the greater context of things. This meant that drama, in the minds of the general audiences, was what came out of their TV sets and what came out of Hollywood - a well made movie. Stefanovski argued that Hollywood, in terms of narrative structure, had nothing to do with 20th century but was still firmly rooted in the narrative tradition of the previous century. The problem of Hollywood was that it didn't know geography and history. When these were implemented in the film, it would almost certainly fail.

Stefanovski widened his statement onto a global view of the present-day civilization constellations. He argued that Europe was immersed in the battle of two civilizations. One civilization is known as patriarchal, familial, Orthodox or Byzantine; it is a vertical civilization in which one doesn't have any personal freedom but belongs to a larger tribe, ethnic circle. On the one hand, belonging to that circle means a great deal of human warmth and closeness. Yet, there is no recognition of anything else but that circle. There is God above and the Patriarch underneath and that is the immanence; in this circle, there is no particular place for women or for the "others", no place for

democracy or tolerance. The opposite of this, in Stefanovski's words, is Donald Duck, being the ultimate representative of the Western civilization. He doesn't belong to anybody, he has no parents, no wife or children. There is nothing larger than himself, no ideology into which he should integrate. He is, in other words, an individual, and even more so, an American individual in "pursuit of happiness", as the American Constitution states.

What is happening right now though is that, as Stefanovski put it, "Donald Duck is entering Byzantium". American soldiers, businessmen, NGO's, journalists and diplomats are strolling across Eastern Europe and the Balkans in awe, trying to figure out what is going on, just as much as the locals are sitting in their cafes and bars, watching suspiciously the strangers walking by, despising them beforehand and making sure to demonstrate their 3000-year-old superiority. Should this clash go on, there could be a possibility that the twain should never meet.

Applying his global view on theatre, Stefanovski stated that tolerance, as the symbol of a truly democratic society, was something incompatible with the stage. On the stage, there was no tolerance as one fought to conquer one's own space. Continuing with his witty examples, Stefanovski pointed out that this was something that people in the Balkans were very good at - removing everybody for the sake of your own place under the sun. Contrary to that and for comparison's sake, he envisaged a performance in Holland, the land of tolerance, where the actors were almost ashamed to be on stage. Stefanovski emphasized that humor also had nothing to do with tolerance or political correctness. Humor and drama are about being horrible.

Judith Herzberg shared an example from her teaching practice. She gave the same dramatic situation as an assignment both to the students in Israel and Holland: two students who applied for a room in the students' house and already paid a lot of money for it find out that they were given the key for the same room. In Israel, having a tradition of sharing rooms because of high costs, the students didn't see anything dramatic about the situation. In Holland, though, the reaction was: "Oh, this is a problem. Let's go downstairs and have a cup of coffee over it!"

On this humorous point, Ann Olaerts adjourned the first session of the conference.

11.30 - 13.00

And this is how it doesn't work in MY country!

Analyst: Rob Klinkenberg (The Netherlands)

Prior to Rob Klinkenberg's analysis of the reader, two participants of the conference presented excerpts of plays in their original languages. **Andres Laasik** from Estonian Drama Theatre, Estonia, read the excerpt from *Maddi Skyiv's* play, "The Day of the Philosopher", staged in Estonian Drama Theatre in 1994. Following Laasik's reading, **Maria Helena Serôdio** from Portugal read an excerpt from a play of Jaime Salazar Sampaio.

Rob Klinkenberg began his comments on the reader by thanking the authors of reports for their endeavour. He stressed that the reader provided an enormous quantity of useful information and that he himself learned a lot from it. Reviewing the introductory text, Klinkenberg expressed a certain ambivalence as far as the necessity of entering a broader context was concerned. He noted that the previous discussion also showed that, in some cases, remaining within one's local context might as well be a satisfactory solution with a lot of advantages. Yet, the main emphasis of the introductory text in the reader was on translation, and Klinkenberg agreed that this was certainly the main issue to be discussed during the conference which he vividly compared to climbing "the spiral staircase up the Babel tower".

Klinkenberg further stressed the variety of cultures and cultural modes which he found to be the most interesting aspect of the reader. He pleaded for a continuous mutual acquaintance between those cultures, but without a forceful gathering under one culturally dominant umbrella. Klinkenberg gave the example of the Dutch government which, in the last five years especially, had campaigned to put the Netherlands on the world cultural map. In his opinion, it was a dubious effort that looked for quality approval outside of local boundaries. As a consequence of this campaign, all Dutch politicians in the European Parliament now speak in Dutch when they address the assembly. Klinkenberg indicated that there was a thin, yet discernible line between striving to preserve one's cultural heritage on one side, and nationalism on the other side. In Europe of today, such a distinction often caused confusion and misunderstanding.

Giving a general outlook, Klinkenberg stated that there was an obvious difference in the problems that were actual in Eastern Europe as opposed to Western European and Nordic countries. After the fall of the Berlin wall, most of Eastern European countries have faced ground zero as far as the basic questions of identity were concerned. As to theatre, it had lost its sharp political edge which was essential in the years of Communism and which made the theatre a forum for discussing and criticizing vital political questions of the time. One might say that the themes of the plays were still universal all over Europe; yet, what differed them was the frame of reference within which they were evolved. Klinkenberg also noticed that, judging from reports, Eastern European theatre authors used different theatrical languages from their Western colleagues: absurdism, for instance, is still very much present in their plays, as a kind of reflection upon the existential situation. That, naturally, raises the question of transplanting such plays into the Western context, which has been estranged from this approach for quite some time. This also applies to symbolism, very much present in Eastern European

plays, being almost a taboo in contemporary Western and Nordic theatre.

Western theatre, on the other hand, deals primarily with the basic premises of theatre machinery, questioning the illusive, make-believe side of theatre; it is also very much engaged in formalistic experiments. Besides that, the theme of individual within, against or beyond society is certainly the dominant one.

Making some statistics out of the available reports, Klinkenberg perceived that, with a few exceptions, most of the countries' theatre repertoires consisted out of one third to one half of domestic plays. He wondered about the other half of the repertory and of its content: were all the foreign plays from the Anglo-Saxon language area or did it vary from country to country? In the Netherlands, for instance, Klinkenberg noticed that a vast majority of foreign plays came from German linguistic area. Ironically, the Dutch strived otherwise to set their identity and culture very much against Germany due to the historical experience.

Another aspect that struck Klinkenberg was an observation in the Macedonian report that the authors in smaller linguistic areas had much easier access to stage than those from the major linguistic areas. In other words, the competition in English-, German- or French-speaking area was fiercer and more uncompromising.

Klinkenberg mentioned several other reports for their specific qualities, such as was Ekaterina Salnikova's report on Russian playwrighting which, in Klinkenberg's words, had an almost Tchekovian quality in describing the confusion and dissipation of a once powerful civilizational context. Another one was Aleksandra Jovičević's report on Yugoslavia; in this report, Klinkenberg found some good proof for his argument concerning the advantages of remaining within one's local boundaries and the possibility of accepting the fact that some plays could not be culturally translated to another context.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen from Denmark picked up on Klinkenberg's last argument and asked how was it possible that practically all Anglo-Saxon plays were translatable in that wider sense.

Maria Helena Serôdio suggested that it was probably the consequence of the overall presence of Anglo-Saxon culture in the countries in minor linguistic areas. She also pointed out one important aspect in the reader, and that was the fact that the export-import business of plays relied much more on theatre practitioners and their personal meetings than on publishers.

Malgorzata Semil from Poland referred back to Klinkenberg's observation on lesser competition in minor-language countries. She said that, while this might be altogether true, there was also a certain kind of contempt for domestic playwrights that was fostered in those countries. Only the most well-known domestic playwrights could afford the luxury of certainty that their plays would be staged, while the other ones were doomed to compete for the place in the repertory with well-written British or fashionable German plays.

Ignacio Herrera de la Muela from Spain reported on his experience in organizing an international encounter on social function of theatre today three years ago. The goal of the encounter was to present works of eight playwrights from different European countries. They were to be presented by *estudios*, schools for professional actors who worked on the texts two months prior to spending the last week with the authors in person. While having great difficulties in grasping the context of many plays in the beginning, the Spanish actors and directors developed a vivid interest once the experts introduced to them the specificities of those countries. The final results varied, but

Herrera was convicted in the benefit of a direct personal contact as the most precious means of translating one work to another cultural context.

In reference to the question of dominance of English-written drama, **Malgorzata Semil** gave an insight in the practice of British theatre. She pointed out the fact that, due to the insularity of the whole society, British theatre was for a long time self-sufficient. Also, British playwrights being protected and nurtured in various ways: through the system of self-help, through the well organized networks of agents that worked properly and, most importantly, through the existence of small studio theatres specialized in staging new plays. Contrary to this, Semil stated, none of this existed in Poland. Any kind of independent theatre practice meant dealing with the formalistic aspects of theatre, not with texts. Thus the studio theatres in Poland neglected the cultivation of plays in favor of visual experimentation. Semil concluded that, according to these facts, some other factors played the role in making a certain language or culture dominant.

Rob Klinkenberg continued Semil's thought by stating that it was probably the economic power of a certain linguistic area that determined its dominance rather than the mere quantitative presence. He assumed that, if Latin America or Spain were to become major economical forces in the future, Spanish would take over the primate from English, just as English did so a century ago in regard to French. Yet, Klinkenberg indicated the tendency in Spain to divide into smaller linguistic areas of Catalan and Basque as a somewhat contradictory one.

Herrera responded to that with an argument in favor, stating that the two languages would soon be officially declared as equal to Spanish. Furthermore, there was already an established practice in Spain of producing plays in their original language and immediately staging them in the Spanish-speaking region. Herrera added that the majority of acknowledged playwrights in Spain currently originated from Catalonia.

Ray Brown from Britain countered Malgorzata Semil's account on the situation in Britain with some facts: the average attendance in Leeds, in the last Civic Theatre to be built in UK, with 1100 seats, was a little over 300; in its 8 years of existence three best performances shown were, in Brown's opinion, Romanian. The only time the theatre is full is at Christmas, when a production of Peter Pan has been repeatedly shown for years. Being originally from Yorkshire, him and his Leeds colleague Hugh Rorrison, together with a group of other playwrights, have formed an organization because that was the only way to protect themselves and structurize their work. There is a regionality in Britain which is reflected more in television and less in theatre. Their theatre in Leeds was sometimes called "The National Theatre of the North", which tends to mean that all the staged plays came from London. Brown reflected upon the reader saying that his impression was that what happened in Eastern Europe in a very compressed period of time had actually happened in Britain and all over Western Europe over a longer period of 20-25 years. Namely, political theatre in Britain was soaked up by the state and lost all of its power and was currently wondering around aimlessly. Brown's hope was that this conference would also provide writers with some ideas on how to move forward.

Ian Rowlands from Wales presented his point of view on playwrighting in Britain. He declared English language culture to be bankrupted which was the reason why English writers found it difficult to write. On the other hand, Rowlands found the theatre in Wales, Scotland, Ireland as well as in Quebec to be in quite a different shape, more creative and vital. In Rowlands' opinion this was due to the fact that these were all nations that were still struggling for their independence; they were more

creative because they didn't yet fulfill their national autonomy. Rowlands pointed out to the difference between nationalism and patriotism, pleading for the latter.

Kjell Kristensen from Norway gave an account on the situation with translating and promoting Norwegian plays abroad. Being the vice-president of the Norwegian Playwrights' Union and the member of the board of the Translation Committee, Kristensen explained that Norwegian state provided substantial means for the translation of Norwegian plays. Yet, his experience was that this was not an assurance that would lead to the production of the plays abroad. This year, for instance, three Norwegian plays were being staged in Britain. But, not only did this not bring financial benefit to the authors; on the contrary, Norwegian Playwrights' Union was asked by one of the English theatres to contribute 10.000 pounds for the production of the Norwegian play!

Ekaterina Salnikova from Russia referred to Rob Klinkenberg's remark on the Tchekovian character of her article in the reader as to a great surprise for her, since she tried to describe the opposite situation: not the one of the end of one époque, but the problems of the beginning of a new époque in Russia. She thought that this meeting was a great opportunity for observing small as well as big misunderstandings deriving from cultural and historical differences. She briefly described the situation in nowadays Russia as the overall process of absorbing Western culture. As people tried to adopt the looks of Americans or Westerners, dramas also tended to copy Western dramatic role models.

Maria Helena Serôdio returned to the issue of the presence of domestic dramas in the repertory of theatres. She described briefly the historical background of the present-day theatre situation in Portugal, stating that the prevalence of foreign plays in Portuguese theater repertory dated from the turn of the century, when the repertory was still dominated by domestic plays. It was then that theatre practitioners realized the need to get acquainted with different approaches to theatre and to learn more from the foreign classical repertory. This lasted for decades, until, during the Salazar regime, Portuguese plays were altogether forbidden. However, after the fall of the regime in 1974, the expected flourishing of Portuguese plays didn't happen. Serôdio found Malgorzata Semil's observation on self-contempt as a very accurate one for Portugal as well. Yet, she informed on the new practice that the playwright *Jorge Silve Melu* had recently started: he was developing his plays in close collaboration with various people, mostly actors, working on new drafts in the form of workshops. He would then stage the final draft with his own company. Serôdio found this method to be highly effective and successful with the audience and saw it as a possible model for re-introducing domestic plays on the repertory.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen concluded this session by emphasizing the demand of the audience for good new domestic plays as an important issue to be further discussed during the conference.

14.30 - 17.00

This is what it means, but does it mean what I think?

What happens to a text that travels from one country to another one?

Chair: Dušan Jovanović (Slovenia)

Speakers: Anna Lakos (Hungary), Vesa Tapio Valoa (Finland), Lis Vibeke Kristensen (Denmark)

After a short presentation of each of the speakers and their professional backgrounds, **Dušan Jovanović** from Slovenia opened the afternoon session by defining the key words for the discussion - universality and compatibility. He set the ground by sharing his personal experience of one who lived most of his life in ex-Yugoslavia, which meant a very specific kind of society. Living in Yugoslavia also meant formation of a particular frame of mind that would not necessarily be compatible with the so-called Western one. Jovanović recalled numerous encounters with his Western colleagues which he described humorously as "close encounters of the third kind", emphasizing their alien-like character. Continuing in sci-fi-techno style, Jovanovic described the difference in thinking and perception as the Easterners being the people of "hardware", and the Westerners being the "software people". "Hardware", in this case, meant the state, economy, politics; the term "software" covered the realm of human sophistication. In the East, everything that had to do with higher levels of human existence or with the myriads of small universes of details from everyday life, was either forbidden or simply non-existent. In Jovanović's opinion, the process of transition in Eastern Europe so far did not make a radical change as far as this division was concerned. Although Eastern European countries widely differ in their present stage of development, there is still a noticeable similarity in what concerns the struggle for transformation. In some of those countries, the struggle even goes on the level of survival. Jovanović concluded that, under such circumstances, spiritual and cultural sophistication was impossible. Inevitably, theatre was affected by these circumstances. Jovanović mentioned the Russian report as an accurate depiction of the despair and confusion in the Russian society that was powerfully reflected in new theatre plays. He pointed out that, when speaking about universality and compatibility, one should bear this aspect in mind.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen gave an example of how adaptation could help on the way to reaching compatibility and universality. At the time of the culmination of feminist movement worldwide, she was working as dramaturg in Denmark, and she chose to translate and promote a Swedish play on a fictitious women's movement. The play was a great success in Sweden, but it stemmed from a very different historical and cultural context than the Danish one. Kristensen and her colleague nevertheless proceeded with working on the project, mainly because they found the topic to be highly provocative and interesting. What they eventually did was a radical adaptation of the play, to the extent that it was almost an autonomous piece. As a result, the production of the adapted play had great success in Denmark. Yet, Kristensen nowadays sees this endeavour with different eyes. She believes that adaptation is not the means of bringing the audience closer to a certain theme or milieu, but that, generally, a good play reaches the audience, no matter how local it is.

Vesa Tapio Valoa from Finland spoke of the significance of reading a play in the process of achieving compatibility. Reading or, rather, interpretation, consisted of various stages: from the preliminary one, followed by the dramaturgical reading, the

professional translation - and it should be done by somebody familiar with theatre - then alternatively the readings of dramaturg and director, until the play was read by the actors, that is, interpreted on the stage. In his opinion, continuous collaboration between authors, translators and directors should be provided through conferences as this one, or through possible centres for meetings. He suggested a type of workshop in which an author, translator and dramaturg would gather together in order to work on a piece. Valoa also mentioned Bonner Biennale as a good example of presenting already staged pieces to a foreign audience: the plays are being translated and all attention is devoted to the optimal transposition of the plays to the audience.

Anna Lakos from Hungary compared the reading of plays to traveling: it is a way to get acquainted with someone else's way of thinking and living. Even if some aspects might be misunderstood or incomprehensible, the benefit from it was great. She gave a few examples of how foreign plays worked or didn't work when translated to Hungarian and into Hungarian context: for instance, Marivaux was quite unaccepted in Hungary; on the other hand, Werner Schwab's plays had a lot of success with Hungarian audience, thanks mainly to a brilliant translator; an example of reversible communication was the staging of Moliere's "Misanthrope" by Kaposvar Theatre, already successful in Kaposvar, that went to Strasbourg, France, and was received with great enthusiasm. She proposed a creation of workshops for translators, since she found this was a vital link in the chain of transposing a play from one cultural context to another.

Hedda Kage from Germany reminded that, besides the Bonner Biennale, there was another manifestation that promoted new texts - Mülheimer Theater Tage. This is a show of new German plays, chosen by a committee, which are being presented to translators from all over the world who decide on the plays they would translate.

Dušan Jovanović pleaded for a broader view on universality and compatibility, of which translation was merely the final stage. **Vesa Tapio Valoa** added that another issue should also be taken in consideration, and that was the question of borders. He suggested that the discussion should focus on political, cultural and economical borders, sometimes much more powerful and limiting than the geographical ones. He also expressed fear from too much enthusiasm regarding the successful promotion of non-English or French or German plays in those countries. In Valoa's opinion, this might lead to a kind of formula writing, or writing within a certain frame of styles and ideas which are certain to succeed.

Ruud Engelder offered a somewhat simpler view, not from the perspective of playwrights, but the audience. He argued that a richer selection of plays, either written in one of those languages or translated to them, offered a greater possibility for a good repertory and a stimulating confrontation with audience. This wouldn't be possible without the "minor" language plays being translated. The issue was, as Engelder said, about access, not success.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen noticed that there was a general need for good plays on global issues that seemed to be important all over the world, regardless to differences in culture and history. Nationalism, migration, the loss of identity due to migration, the resurgence of neo-fascism, ecology - those were some of the issues Kristensen saw as widely actual.

Niklas Brunius from Sweden warned that excessive adaptation could work against the play and, moreover, against the interest of the public. He argued that audiences in smaller countries may have developed a greater amount of curiosity and would want to be confronted with new cultures and mores, even at the risk of not

E R R A T U M

On page 13, line 27 must be replaced by
'playwright Wole Soyinka who wrote all his plays in a highly sophisticated
English. Yet,'

On page 17, line 25 must be replaced by
'the magazine. For instance, Soyinka's plays were published but never staged in
Poland.'

Amsterdam, October 1997
Theater Instituut Nederland

understanding every hint or allusion.

Ekaterina Salnikova said that every good play was a work of images, motives and special spirit, unique atmosphere that could be preserved in spite of any translation. She brought the example of Shakespeare who, in the course of centuries, became an almost domestic figure in Russia, his plays being staged innumerable times in countless versions. Salnikova described her surprise when she was introduced for the first time with Shakespeare's original texts: they were dramatically different from what she has known as the Russian version! Still, the essence and the spirit of Shakespeare's plays were preserved in the translation, proving that the fundamental values of a great work of art could not vanish when transposed to another context.

Dragan Klaić from the Netherlands pleaded for focusing on contemporary plays and authors rather than discussing the issues of adaptation of classical plays. He also suggested to participants to assume a common ground for analysis and discussion by limiting it, for the sake of the argument, to Europe and European experience which still comprised a large set of similarities and potential compatibilities, in spite of differences and varieties. Klaić argued that the usage of the term "border" might carry too a negative connotation. He therefore suggested the terms of "cultural difference" and "cultural specifics" instead. Something "culturally different" didn't necessarily mean not understandable; it could be perceived and recognized, even on the level of aesthetics. In Klaić's opinion, the problem of texts crossing borders was not in cultural differences but of how the system worked, how the networks of theatres, agencies, publishing houses, translators and dramaturgs were organized. Those are the real pockets of ignorance that hinder the dynamics of exchange. Klaić's belief is that, on European level, this is an obstacle that could be surmounted if tackled in a proper manner. Naturally, cultural differences and specifics grow drastically when one takes into account non-European cultures. Klaić gave a striking example of the famous Nigerian playwright *Volle Soinka* who wrote all his plays in a highly sophisticated English. Yet, he was not performed in Europe. His plays could be read and his mastering of English language could be admired, but the themes and the problems that he dealt with were too remote from European experience.

Klaić further argued that, while the existence of global issues was indubitable and certainly something that concerned Europe, the playwrights could not approach global issues in global ways because that would result in bad plays. Thus, to handle global issues, such as ecological problems, unemployment, generation gap, migration, growing xenophobia - means to tackle them in a specific and particular way. Only then can they become universally accepted and understood.

Cheryl Robson from the UK shared her view on the last 10 years in British theatre. In that period, there was an obvious movement away from writing issue plays. Since the failure of Socialism, there hasn't been a clear political consensus. Therefore, the people broke down in constituencies. As a consequence of that, there was a considerable growth of Black, Asian or women's and gay's plays. In the course of the years, this practice has evolved into a body of work. In her view, Eastern European countries have yet to go through that process; in fact, they are just at the beginning of it. Therefore, accessing Eastern European works might bring various difficulties for the Westerners: they either seem old-fashioned or they are discussing ideas that were already discussed in the West, etc. This might also be the reason why Western works are accepted in the East but not vice versa.

Helena Albertova from the Czech Republic agreed with previous conclusions that

the problem of texts crossing borders was in the people or, more precisely, in the hindered flow of information. She gave account on her own experience as a theatre person who, in the times of Socialism, had had access to various information, both from East and West, as well as contacts with theatre makers and performances from all over the world. Contrary to what Jovanović said in his opening word, Albertova felt that the period of Communist rule was a time when there was a rich and vivid exchange of information and ideas, whereas now, in the transition time, this has all gone down to a minimum. The paradox is that all of this was happening in the so-called Information Age, where Internet and other means of communication provided people with almost unlimited possibilities of information exchange. Albertova's opinion was that this is due, among other things, to the redundancy of information: we are so poorly informed nowadays precisely because we have access to too much information. She therefore proposed a formation of a databank of information on important plays from all European countries, with serious pre-selection made on the local level, so that the inundation would be avoided.

Katarina Pejović from Yugoslavia/Slovenia pondered back on the topic of translation, pointing out the problem of direct communication of one "minor" language culture with another one of the same kind. Speaking about this, Pejović introduced the notion of center and periphery in the cultural sense: periphery was, almost invariably, doomed to receive information through the center, even if it was coming from the other end of periphery. In spite of the advantages of the Information Age, the interchange of complex information still depended on the classical skills such as language command. Passing through the layers of mediation, a intricate and deep structure such as a play might suffer from being reduced or simplified. Pejović suggested the discussion on the possibilities of finding solutions for this problem and, perhaps, ways of recruiting people in the "minor" language countries who had good command of other "minor" languages.

Malgorzata Semil endorsed Helena Albertova's account on the flow of information in Socialist countries, but she added another perspective to it: the idea or, rather, the name of the game was to look underneath or beyond the information that was officially provided by the government or the Ministry of culture. This could have been achieved mainly through personal contacts with people from other Socialist countries and those contacts were the best source of otherwise unattainable information on what was really going on in those countries.

Ruud Engeland made the distinction between qualified and quantified information, but emphasized that there was no such thing as a country selecting information, in this case, plays. It was always a matter of individual judgment. He also distinguished aimless information from the targeted one, citing the case of translated plays that were coming from Hungary in the 70's and 80's. Those were the plays from all over the world, not only from Hungary, and were dispatched to innumerable addresses where they ended, at best, on somebody's library shelf.

Hedda Kage warned that, even when there was a good translation of a good play from a minor-language country to a major language, the problem would occur at the stage of promotion within theatre institutions: very often, there would be a lack of curiosity or unwillingness to get acquainted with another cultural context, and those plays would end up on shelves.

Dušan Jovanović added another type of border to the already established list: that between dramaturgs and directors. Himself a director, Jovanović's experience was that

directors could often get excited about a certain text, but the dramaturgs would be unwilling to accept it.

Franček Rudolf from Slovenia brought out the question of the quality of translation which could be crucial for the reception of a certain work. He illustrated this question with a humorous story on how, in ex-Yugoslavia, he read Hegel in Serbo-Croatian and it was perfectly understandable. Later on, when he read it in German, he discovered how complicated his writing was. Ultimately, when he got acquainted with the Slovenian translation, he couldn't understand a bit!

Niklas Brunius expressed his opinion that, again, it was the question of willingness and motivation to invest energy into discovering new plays and different cultural contexts. He pleaded for more enthusiasm and diligence in this direction.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen responded to this remark by giving the example of the initiative that the Danish Literature Information Center has taken. It is the translators' seminar in which translators, in this case, Danish ones, are discussing the issues and problems they are acquainted with. Kristensen once again pointed out the example of Bonner Biennale which was much more than a festival in the classical sense: it was a workshop, a presentation forum and a polygon for the on-going discussion on the state of the European drama.

Malgorzata Semil argued that the problem of translators' seminars was that such endeavours cost quite a lot and were affordable solely for the countries that already had a developed system of subsidies for those fields. In Socialist countries, such an initiative existed: for instance, there was an annual Festival of new Polish drama in Wroclaw to which translators were also invited. In the frame of the festival, they had a seminar on the novelties in the dramatic production. A similar initiative was currently going on in Hungary. Yet, the problem of finances remained unsolvable for most of the countries.

Dušan Jovanović adjourned the afternoon session by extracting from the discussion another two key words for further thinking on this issue - curiosity and access.

Friday, June 27

10.00 - 11.30

I only do this because it is my job!

Publishers, agents, magazines, festivals, translators, critics: what do they do to make texts accessible in a different linguistic context?

Chair: Dragan Klaić (The Netherlands)

Speakers: Alina Cadariu (Romania), Justine Grou-Radenez (Italy), Cheryl Robson (UK) and Malgorzata Semil (Poland)

Dragan Klaić greeted the participants by saying that this session was envisaged as a more practical, down-to-the-ground insight into the daily practice of searching for good new plays and trying to make them circulate internationally. The speakers were therefore all tightly connected with this practice and were to give their insight into the matter.

After a brief consultation on who was the first playwright in history to have an international career in his lifetime, and after reaching a consensus that it was by all means Henrik Ibsen, Klaić made a thorough analysis of the reasons, circumstances and motives that made Ibsen the first internationally recognized dramatic figure in his lifetime. The circumstances certainly didn't work in his favor: being Norwegian, he was writing in a very small language. Yet, this wasn't an obstacle. In Klaić's opinion, the reason why was that Ibsen actually lived in emigration. Ibsen lived in Germany, Austria as well as Italy. By traveling, he established a huge network of journalists, translators, critics, theatre producers and directors who were all fascinated by his personality and his plays and took the trouble to pay attention to them. He managed to create liaisons with persons of respect and influence in the theatrical world in several key countries; they became his accolades, his representatives, his advocates and supporters. This is proven by the regularity of appearance of his plays. Also, he was a productive playwright, and that too in a regular manner: his rhythm was one play every two years. As soon as the play was written, French and German translators were ready to do the translation. A lot of Ibsen translations are not from Norwegian, but from German, French or English. Thus, one could speak about three key factors that contributed to Ibsen's European success: regularity, exile and network. Of course, besides that, the crucial factor was the content of his plays. Ibsen wrote about the bourgeois existence that certainly had some cultural specifics; yet, there was a critical mass of social and individual experience which was common to all of European bourgeoisie of the second half of the 19th century. Because of that, Ibsen's plays were communicating with large audience and were appealing to producers and directors who didn't see them as plays about life in Norway, but as plays about the pitfalls and moral challenges of bourgeois life in Europe.

The question was what happened to the potential Ibsens who lived in some of the small countries of contemporary Europe, being equipped with all the gadgets of modern-time communication? The first to give her insight into the matter was **Malgorzata Semil**, a long-time magazine editor who was particularly engaged in publishing contemporary plays. Bearing in mind the impressive bibliography of published plays in this monthly from 1956 up to now, Klaić asked Semil to comment on the "political

economy of attention" of the editors working in the magazine.

Semil explained that the attention pattern changed and varied through time. In the period of Socialism, there was an obligation to scrutinize neighboring countries, a fact that didn't exclude natural curiosity for what was hiding behind the official surface. This required a tremendous amount of energy and resources; the editors had to maintain contact with a large number of people in those countries, but also be very patient with translators. The latter ones were often a good source of information due to their keen interest in the language area they were covering. They would be asked to give suggestions, yet these were not used as a reliable source of information. Also, the practice would be to find another translation of the same work and work in a comparative manner. This is how, for instance, Russian translations of plays from Israel would be used when translating them into Polish. Besides that, the editors were monitoring for a long time what was going on outside Europe. The interest in African and Asian theatre had partly to do with the general interest of the theatre of the 60's; still, in every country there were fans of a certain culture. They might not be the best translators, but they could be fantastic informers. They are usually scholars with their own network of people and they come up with interesting information. Semil gave the example of recently meeting a young girl who was writing an M.A. thesis on the contemporary Korean playwright *Lee Kang Bek*. Semil asked her to provide her with some of his plays and she ended up discovering six marvelous plays by this author. The consequence was that the magazine published three of his plays with an introductory text by the author who, a month later, even came to visit Poland! The most interesting thing is that the theatres in Poland are ready to stage Bek's plays. Unfortunately, this is one of the rare cases; usually, the discovery of a playwright would end with his play being published in the magazine. For instance, Soinka's plays were published but never staged in Poland. A similar thing happened to various playwrights, even Western ones. But, what could also happen quite often was that the plays would be published and only 10 or 15 years later they would be discovered by the theatres. This was the case with Thomas Bernhard's plays.

Cheryl Robson is running Aurora Publishing House which is focused on women's writing. It grew out of women's theatre workshop and their quest for plays with good female characters and written from female perspective. The search consisted mainly of contacting cultural institutes, translators, theaters and theatre magazines as well as word of mouth; in other words, it didn't rely, as one might expect, on the network that emerged through women's movement. Being based in London where there are communities of people from every corner of the world was certainly an advantage. That is how the first collection of women's plays was compiled and published. It featured 6 authors from all over the world. Since the appearance of the publication 2 years ago, all of them except one have had a production or a stage reading in London. The author of the yet unstaged play, *Myriam Keyne* from Israel, organized a conference in Israel based on the book; thus, the spirit of the book was brought to the Israeli public.

The activity of Aurora Publishing House proves that one can publish works using a specific set of criteria which would appeal to people in general. For instance, in Britain there are a lot of actresses looking for good female roles. Still, most of the plays from the first Aurora collection were produced in regular theatres and not by women's groups. Another aspect of publishing women's plays is the promotion of certain authors. For instance, *Louisa Kunie*, the Catalan playwright, was unknown in Britain before the publishing of the book. Since then, she has had two productions of her play in London;

recently she was invited to be part of the Spanish season in the Royal Court Theatre where her new play was read.

The specifically British tradition of public readings of plays, Robson confirmed, helped quite a lot in promotion of plays. Aurora made it a regular habit to present the plays in public readings and preferably arrange another private one before the play would go into production. Due to the fact that there is a large number of actors in London willing to do a reading for very little money, the readings were usually of high quality.

Justine Grou-Radenez from Italy introduced La Loggia, a center for international dramatic writing seated near Florence, Italy. Their work is based on the diffusion and promotion of the knowledge on the international plays. La Loggia has a documentation centre and it strives to be a point where theatre professionals communicate and get all the information on new plays from abroad. The centre has developed a broad network for gathering data: there is a translators' committee per linguistic area; a network of readers; finally, there is collaboration with institutions such as foreign cultural centres and embassies in Italy. The quest can start either from a personal contact with authors or people with good information, or it can be initialized out of a realization on the lack of information from a certain area. For instance, La Loggia is currently working on a project on the presentation of Latin American drama which is entirely unknown in Italy. The project began with contacting Argentinean directors living in Italy who then created connections with authors in Argentina.

Since one of its main goals is also to be a meeting point for theatre professionals, La Loggia is organizing residences for authors and translators who then work together on the translation of the author's play. After a few days, the actors join them and they all work, testing the translation, until it is finished. In the end, there is a public reading to which theatre makers and festival people are invited. Tuscany is otherwise well known for its particularly dense infra-structure of theatres and festivals. Those public readings often have a positive outcome for the author who is invited back to Italy for the production of his/her play.

La Loggia also works in collaboration with publishers since it doesn't have its own publishing house.

Alina Cadariu from Romania is trying to further contemporary writing in her country. She is running a programme called "Drama Fest" which is a new Romanian playwrighting programme. In the beginning, it was a strictly Romanian programme, but now it has a tendency to become regional since a lot of people from the region got attached to it. The essence of the programme is producing new plays. It has emerged as the reaction to the 8-year-long unsuccessful campaign of Romanian theatre critics who tried to impose new playwrights to theatres. Due to political circumstances, there was a big resistance and reluctance on the side of managers and directors to stage Romanian plays. That is why Drama Fest works with new playwrights and directors trying to create a climate for the meeting of the authors of the same generation.

As far as the regional character of the programme is concerned, Drama Fest plans to organize in collaboration with Open Society Institute a regional meeting of theatre practitioners from post-Socialist countries who do new playwrighting. The meeting would comprise a workshop which would help the circulation of plays. Another component in the programme will be a regional festival in April next year featuring plays from Romania and other countries. It is already known that there are going to be three new Romanian plays produced for the festival. The plays were chosen by the

directors and not by the theatres. Cadariu's opinion is that competition is a crucial component for the growth of playwrighting production.

Klaić further explored the issue of trends in playwrighting: Is there such a thing as shifting international fashion, a prevalent request for certain genre or themes in a certain period? **Malgorzata Semil** confirmed the existence of trends. Her view was that a trend would start by a certain author who would tune in the vibes of the society and that would make him topical and generate a worldwide interest for his work. But, as far as the general interest is concerned, what might work in one country might prove to be of complete insignificance for another one. She gave the example of Christopher Hampton's play "Tales from Hollywood" which dealt with the fates of European artists and intellectuals who fled from Nazism and found themselves struggling for survival amidst the glam and glory of Hollywood film industry. The play, featuring the famous Austrian playwright Ödön von Horvath as the main character, was originally produced in UK and had a moderate success. But, when it was translated and produced in Poland during the time of Martial Law, it had an immense impact, and precisely because of the subject: it was staged in the theatre and then done three times as TV production! Eventually, it was considered as one of the best plays of the decade. A similar thing happened with "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", which gained its worldwide popularity as a film. Yet, in Poland, it was staged in theatre at the time of the rise of "Solidarity" movement, and it was visited by thousands of spectators who found the metaphorical level of the play coinciding with their reality.

Cheryl Robson added another interesting aspect of influence of a certain play: Hampton was responsible for making von Horvath known in England by translating his plays. He also introduced to British audience Yasmina Reza's play "Art" which is currently one of the most popular and staged plays in Europe. **Semil** countered this fact by saying that in Poland, in spite of her constant efforts to promote it, the play was adamantly refused by numerous actors. Their arguments for refusal were that they sensed a homosexual undertone in the play; but, more importantly, the Polish actors asserted that the feelings and the attitudes towards life of the three male characters were essentially petit bourgeois. They didn't find any proper correspondence with it, probably because they felt that in Poland there was currently no petit bourgeois, at least not among the theatre audience.

Hedda Kage brought the example of Latin American playwright Ariel Dorfman who had an enormous success all over Germany. Yet, his plays prevented other Latin American plays dealing with politics and terrorism to reach German audience. On the other hand, Dorfman was quite unpopular in Latin America itself, where people saw his plays as heavy commercialization of a serious and grave subject.

Klaić raised the issue of radio as a possibly important medium for promoting new plays and helping them on their way to eventual staging. **Hedda Kage** said that in Germany, where there was a large radio production, it usually happened the other way round: the plays reached radio via theatre. Nevertheless, the number of adapted theatre plays for radio was relatively small, since the preference was to have a work originally written for radio. **Žarko Petan** from Slovenia added that, this being true for German plays, it had a different impact on plays that came from smaller countries: in case of some of his dramas, radio was a crucial promoter in Germany.

Hugh Rorrison from the UK presented the situation in Britain concerning this subject. He called it a two-way traffic: The foreign plays went first either through a stage reading, then to the radio and eventually to a production, or they were first

broadcasted.

Malgorzata Semil's attitude was that radio was a tremendous help in circulating plays. Very often she picked up new plays by hearing them on the radio, especially in the countries where radio was still a strong medium, as was, for instance, in the Nordic countries.

Haukur Ólafur Símonarson reported briefly on the activity of the European Broadcasting Union. Its members have regular meetings where they decide on the international exchange of plays. Some years ago, a decision was made that, instead of looking at all countries at once, there should be a two-year focus on one country. Iceland was chosen as the first country, followed now by Estonia. As a consequence, some 50 Icelandic radio plays were selected and translated to major languages. Those plays were broadcasted worldwide, in Europe as well as in Australia and Korea, for instance, and it was an important occasion for the Icelandic drama writing. The plays are still in circulation.

12.00 - 13.00

Who's doing what where how anyway?

Existing programmes and schemes to promote dramatic work in an international context.

Chair: Ruud Engelder (The Netherlands)

Speaker: Baiba Tjarve (Latvia)

The second session of the day was dedicated to the review and analysis of the main European institutions which were committed to supporting culture, specifically those which offered support in the field of playwrighting and translation.

Baiba Tjarve from Latvia commented on the list of institutions that she compiled during her internship in Theater Instituut Nederland. Her main observation was that programmes for support in those fields were scarce; thus, one could speak about impossibilities rather than possibilities.

Analyzing the ARIANE programme, Tjarve pointed out the problematic requirements for application for translation of theatrical works: namely, the application had to be submitted by at least two directors, managers or producers and the translation had to be made into at least two languages of the European Union. The same goes for application for cooperation and training projects, where at least three member states have to be involved in the project. Another problem concerns the nature of the theatrical text which is sometimes treated as literary work, and sometimes as a species of its own. Chances to be accepted in the programme are thus slimmer. It means that one might have to submit the same project to both ARIANE and Kaleidoscope, another European Commission programme which is more focused on theatrical works. Also, European Community's notion of minority languages widely differs from the one that was established at this conference: according to EU, minority languages are only those that are not official languages of EU. This narrows the field by a large margin and creates a pessimistic outlook on the perspective of funding for translation.

As far as the national initiatives are concerned, cultural institutes of countries from major linguistic area (such as Goethe Institut, British Council or French Cultural Centre, etc.) are not supporting translations from minority languages to major languages. The only exception is KulturKontakt from Austria which deals with such activities. British Council has started recently a huge worldwide drama competition, but is currently considering whether it will go on with this initiative.

The discussion further focused on experiences of people who received European money for their projects. **Marian Popescu** from Romania and his organization Uniter have just started a project funded by the Kaleidoscope programme. Yet, Popescu confessed, obtaining that money required heavy bureaucratic engagements. The project was based on translating foreign plays from France, Germany and Ireland. In the second phase of the project, the translated plays would be staged in the theatres.

Kjell Kristensen informed of a less agreeable practice: the French publishing house, La Maison Antoine Vitez, decided to dedicate one of its editions to the Norwegian drama, but they asked the Norwegian Playwrights' Association to pay a large sum for it!

Alja Predan from Slovenia managed to obtain a grant from the French Ministry of Culture for the translation of the Dictionary of Theatre by Patrice Pavis, but the information reached her by chance - through the translator who had a personal contact with the book's agent who, on his part, had a connection within the Ministry.

Cheryl Robson's Aurora Publishing House received a 3,000-pounds grant from the European Commission for the translation of one of Dacia Maraini's plays. Unfortunately, it turned out that Maraini had already allocated the rights for the play to another publisher who wouldn't allow the sub-licensing of the play. When Aurora asked the EU to transfer the money to another of Maraini's plays, they responded negatively saying that Aurora had to submit a new application!

Justine Grou-Radenez's La Loggia had received a Kaleidoscope grant two years ago for a project on children's theatre which comprised a translation residence for six French-speaking authors. As far as the project on presentation of Latin American theatre in Italy is concerned, La Loggia had to apply twice for it; this year, the grant was confirmed.

Ruud Engelder warned that such successful examples should not be taken as a rule, since it was his experience that obtaining grants was quite difficult.

Krisztina Baba from Hungary informed on the new institution, the Translation House, which dealt with translations both from Hungarian and into Hungarian. Most importantly, they are offering money for the translation of Hungarian plays and novels into other languages.

Halmar Sigurdson from Iceland talked about a new programme within the EU called MIDAS or Info 2000. The programme is oriented towards multimedia and has substantial means. Sigurdson suggested that this programme could provide the money for making a CD-ROM which would contain texts of plays, but also excerpts from performances and any other accompanying material on the play and the author. The requirement is to have at least three associates to work on the project in two countries.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen added that the Danish Literature Information Center is also funding translation of Danish plays.

Malgorzata Semil's magazine received a substantial funding from France for the translation of eight plays; also, some money came from Italy and Sweden.

Speaking about the already existing practices of promoting European plays, **Hannah Hurtzig** gave an account on the work of Bonner Biennale of which she was currently the selector. Bonner Biennale was established in 1992 by Tankred Dorst and Manfred Beilhartz as a kind of reaction to the tendency of creating a culturally unified Europe. They wanted to work on the preservation of the diversity of culture on the Continent and thus started a festival that would present plays from all over Europe. The festival presents up to 28 performances by contemporary European playwrights, mostly produced in the country of origin. All authors are invited to the festival together with the so-called "godfathers". Those are the persons who function as advisers on what is interesting in terms of new playwrighting in each European country and thus make a pre-selection for the Bonner Biennale selector. The plays are being presented in their original language and accompanied with a simultaneous translation. If the translation doesn't already exist, Bonner Biennale commissions it. As a consequence, there is a small library of plays presented at Bonner Biennale now in Bonn. Every year, one of the presented plays is being published in Theater Heute which helps a lot in promoting the play in Germany. But, only a few find a further publisher. Hurtzig felt that one of the reasons for publishers' lack of interest in contemporary plays lay in the fact that -

according to her personal request - the total number of premiers of contemporary plays in the last season in Germany, Austria and Switzerland amounted to a mere 150! One of the features of Bonner Biennale is its role as the meeting point for all authors and "godfathers", which comes down to 60 guests. Bonner Biennale also plans for the next edition to increase the number of workshops and seminars.

Hurtzig also informed on the new small theatre in Berlin, Die Baracke, which was dedicated to presenting solely contemporary plays. It is linked to the Deutsches Theater which gave money for it but its programme is completely independent from the financier. Still, it works with the actors from Deutsches Theater ensemble. They are currently trying to speed up the process of staging of contemporary plays by having a shorter rehearsing period and performing for 6 weeks only. Up until now, this method has proven to be very successful. Apart from regular production, every half year they have one week of stage readings for which the authors are also invited. So, for instance, one has the opportunity to see ten Russian plays in one week! The three young theatre managers look for plays exclusively through private contacts.

Küllli Holsting from Estonia presented the activity of the Estonian Drama Agency which was established in 1994. As far as international contacts and collaborations are concerned, up to this moment, the presentation of Estonian drama was mostly concentrated on Finland where a significant number of plays were presented. The Agency is currently working on the development of international network in order to promote Estonian drama more widely.

Dragan Klaić notified on the big Mediterranean programme in the making. The EU is committing some 500.000.000 ECUs for programmes of all sorts in that region. The other thing is that ARIANE, Kaleidoscope and similar programmes will be probably phased out within the next two years and nobody knows what will replace them. It seems as the administrators in Brussels don't have a vision on how to restructure this frame of activities. That is why several international networks of theatre professionals all over Europe are currently busy trying to come up with some interesting comprehensive proposals so that they can lobby within their national governments, their representatives in Brussels, various Brussels offices and, most importantly, among the members of the European Parliament. Most of those parliamentarians, in Klaić's opinion, understand that project Europe is feasible predominantly as a cultural project. For instance, EFAH (European Forum for Arts and Heritage) has taken an initiative to design several ideas in order to come to some more comprehensive schemes for the future.

Kristian Seltun from Norway talked about a project in Bergen under the name "Theatre Text in Context". It is the continuation of a 1992 project called "Norwegian Dramatic Arts Project". This project is aimed at developing new dramas, and not working on already existing ones. The focus is on discussing new aesthetics in theatre and visions of new approaches to playwrighting.

Marian Popescu reflected upon the predictions on political moves concerning European culture at the end of the century and its long-term and widespread effects. Popescu also warned on the fact that, when talking about "Europe", one had to bear in mind that this word actually comprised several different Europes. As an illustration of different European perspectives, Popescu cited the recently held Gulliver meeting in Bucharest. The title of the meeting was "Has the Iron Curtain fallen down?" But, in the English version, the title turned into "Curtain up!"

Talking about the current Romanian practice, Popescu pointed out the importance of understanding the varieties of audience. In Romania, the audience was previously

treated monolithically, and that was false. There were different categories of audience and the need for plays for those various categories was finally recognized. Popescu and his colleagues have recently published in their small publishing house, Unitext, a series of foreign plays. At the moment, Unitext is the only databank for contemporary foreign as well as Romanian plays in Romania.

Ruud Engelder adjourned this session by giving the framework for the three working groups that would discuss the proposed topics in the afternoon:

- What would be the ways and models for Culture in Balance to continue its work in the future, especially in terms of European arts policy?
- Information: what, who, how?
- Translations and how to improve them? (methods, residences, workshops, subsidies, etc.)

14.30 - 16.00

Three working groups

Group I

Chairman: Maria Helena Serôdio (Portugal)

Notes: Katarina Pejović (Yugoslavia/Slovenia)

The first working group has reached the following conclusions:

1. A databank on plays and authors should be put on the Internet. The databank should also contain one info package for each play - much in the line of VTI's and TIN's Fact Sheets - that would provide information on plot, characters and style of the play. This package should also contain explanation on the theatrical and cultural context of the play, short CV of the author, name and contact address of the agent as well as any available multimedia material: photos, slides, excerpts from the productions, audio dialogues, etc. Another important item in the databank is the list of translators (names, linguistic skills, contact addresses, etc.). If the project of the databanks would include multimedia, then it would be possible to apply for MIDAS funding, as **Halmar Sigurdsson** had earlier suggested. He also came up with an idea of creating a CD-ROM which would contain basic material and a link with which one would get connected to the databank on the Web. In this way, updating and adding information or comments to the databank would be much easier and handier. Also, a thing that shouldn't be neglected, this way of spreading information is much cheaper than endless printing and re-printing of material.

2. To establish a homepage of Culture in Balance on the Net as well as chat groups in order to have an immediate and direct communication.

3. To promote meetings and workshops among young directors and playwrights which would probably be organized in the context of theatre academies. Similar workshops should be organized for translators that would work with actors' help. Connected to that, meetings that would address specific problems of translation should also take place.

4. To generalize initiatives similar to Bonner Biennale and to try to establish the practice of stage readings in countries that don't have that tradition as an efficient means of getting acquainted with the given play's.

5. To plead for a change of regulations in the EU concerning the trilateral collaboration on projects; instead of three, two parties should be able to apply for funding.

Group I has had a critique of the work of organizations such as ITI and ETC which have tried in the past to promote plays and stimulate international exchange, but without success. The prevailing opinion was that this was due to their rigid and formal organization. Culture in Balance was perceived as a possibility of developing more flexible and broad models of interchange of dramatic texts, more in the spirit of IETM.

Group II

Chairman: Niklas Brunius (Sweden)

Notes: Baiba Tjarve (Latvia)

1. Group II dealt first with the question of who selected the plays? The selection should be based on personal contact and others should rely on the information. The suggestion was that the source of information on a particular play should come from the country where the production of that play would take place, not from the country from which it originated. Another suggestion was to select every year three most important plays from every country, but the annual production of some smaller countries may not provide three plays of good quality. So, the number should be flexible. The selection board should also be flexible and changed every two years.

2. Another issue is whose task it would be to promote the plays. On the local level, it would usually be public or individual initiatives; on international level, those would be institutions. There would still be enough space for agents to make a lucrative business out of it.

The method of promotion of a locally known play on the international scene can be developed on two levels:

a. on macrolevel, through media - objective and formal level; this could be done in various ways: through fact sheets, source books, Internet. The group had an extensive discussion on the Internet, its good and bad sides. The main objections to it were that it was redundant in information and that the information itself was remote and deprived of human touch.

b. on microlevel, the promotion happens on person-to-person level, through unmediated contacts in forms of workshops, seminars - in other words, through personal exchange. Another possibility is organizing tours of the productions abroad. The emphasize was put onto the generation aspect; people of the same generation are much more likely to start collaborations and joint projects; that is why initiatives for such projects should take place at the theatre academies.

Group II has also given a critical view on ITI and ETC, much like Group I.

The overall conclusion of this group was that the span of this issue was between stock market and love affair.

Group III

Chairman: Marian Popescu (Romania)

Notes: Dennis Meyer (The Netherlands)

1. On European level it is very important to stimulate the awareness that there is such a thing as playwrights and theatre texts coming from "minor" language areas that do not cross borders.

One way to do so is to make politicians in one's own country aware of the situation of playwrights and theatre texts.

Another way is to send a letter to European policy makers with the following points:

European policy should:

- a. further translations of plays written in "lesser known" languages with "bigger" as well as "smaller" languages for production or publication sources.
- b. further the training of drama translators from and into small languages
- c. further the exchange of information on European playwrighting by electronic media as well as other means of communication, and through informal networks
- d. further events stressing the importance of European plays written in "smaller" languages.

2. There is no information on the cultural background of Eastern European countries, neither in the particular country itself, nor in other countries. It is therefore of great importance to establish a databank that would contain information on, for instance, playwrights and theatre texts. Each country should work on its own databank. In turn, all these databanks should be connected.

One way of making this information available to everybody is to use the Internet.

3. Another important issue is the translation of plays. Translators should be native speakers and theatre people. Ideally, it would be a translator who would be a native speaker of the language in which he/she is translating and would have a good command of the language in which the play was written. In most cases, however, this is not feasible. In that case, one would need two translators. It is important to build up skills of the translators from "minor" languages. This could be done through bilateral projects or through projects involving several countries.

Saturday, June 28

10.00 - 13.00

What to do?

A general discussion about ways to maintain and improve our contacts, widen the circle, and exchange information. Conclusions and presentation of future projects.

Chair: Ruud Engeland (The Netherlands)

Ruud Engeland opened the last session of the conference by proposing three topics for the final wrap-up. Those were the topics that summarized the conclusions of three working groups:

1. Information
2. Networks
3. The joint statement addressed to the EU.

As far as the issue of information was concerned, Engeland stressed that, talking about the establishment of a homepage or a Website on the Internet, there was a tendency to forget that it was somebody who had to do it, update it and maintain it.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen replied to this remark and said that in group III there was a discussion on creating possibilities for EU funding such endeavour, as well as providing additional funding for the less developed countries where Internet was still not a common means of communication.

After a few other remarks considering various tasks that should be undertaken, **Engeland** pointed out that this had to do with the fundamental notion of a network. The answer to the question "Who is going to do it?" is not and cannot be "The Network". For, the network is not an actor, it is a group of people. Engeland suggested a discussion that would clarify the very notion of network. He himself offered a simple and humorous definition of network: The purpose of the network is to network. Yet, the obviousness of this definition is severely tested in reality. The problem lies on the level of concrete duties, when it comes to publishing a book, organizing a conference, etc. For, activities are initiated by network members, not by "The Network". The network is merely an idea, a concept. It just gives one an opportunity to exchange ideas and views and communicate one's plans to those who should know about them. Networking is a continuous activity which often takes place outside of the frame of any official and formal occasions. It is a constant awareness of the importance of forwarding information. It is definitely not an organization. Engeland observed that, in the last three days, a network had obviously developed among the participants. The question was whether the participants wanted to continue with it. **Ray Brown** warned on the consequences of the formalization of network, arguing that it might have a destructive effect on it. **Maria Helena Serôdio** countered this by saying that without formalization on the organizational level no tasks could be carried out. **Engeland** pointed out that even the most informal of networks (which this one would hopefully be) needed a light administrative structure in order to be functional. **Kristensen** proposed to define key issues that should be forwarded to the representatives in Brussels which would, in turn, lobby for those issues in the EU. The results of this lobbying should be the landmark for the next Culture in Balance meeting.

Andres Laasik from Estonia stressed the importance of the reader and suggested a continuation on its publication and development.

Niklas Brunius gave a concrete pledge. He offered to make copies of the reader and dispatch them to Swedish theatres, giving the contact address of Theater Instituut Nederland for any further information. Secondly, he pledged to further the communication and exchange of information on the international level. Finally, Brunius promised to contact the Swedish Institute and see whether it was possible to obtain funding from it. He suggested to all participants to do the same thing at their local institutions and thus work towards the creation of a kind of joint fund to which everybody would contribute. What would be the gathering point for the money and who should be in charge of that was something to be discussed.

Francka Slivnik from Slovenia followed the line of Brunius' proposal on joint fund and added that she would contact Slovenian Ministry of Culture which was currently in the process of redefining its strategy and policy, make them aware on Culture in Balance activities and encourage them to support them financially.

Cipriana Petre from Romania supported Laasik's proposal on the wider distribution of the reader urging the participants to work actively on this, since this would greatly help the promotion of Culture in Balance. As far as networking was concerned, her personal experience was that the only functional networking was a bilateral one, based on personal contacts and communication.

Ray Brown suggested for the reader to be put on floppy disk since that would enable an easy and cheap distribution.

Helena Albertova will publish extracts from the reader articles in her theatre magazine.

Cheryl Robson will write an article on the conference in the New Playwrights' Trust magazine which has about 800 members-subscribers. She will offer them a possibility to obtain a copy of the reader from the NPT which she would provide for. She will also take copies of the reader to the Royal Court Theatre, British Theatre Institute and the British Council and make sure they were aware of it. She suggested this method for all participants in their own countries.

Engelander pledged that, for the time being, Theater Instituut Nederland would collect information on this subject and disseminate it. This went along with Ian Rowlands' question on where should additional reports from uncovered linguistic areas be sent.

Ignacio Herrera said that, for a long time, he had an idea to connect Culture in Balance to the School for Translators in Toledo which was one of the oldest in Europe. Apart from giving information on the reader and distribute it, Herrera offered to work towards organizing the next meeting in Toledo, but with a more practical edge.

Engelander pointed out that Lisbon had already made a firm commitment to organize the next meeting in two-years time. **Dragan Klaić** suggested that the formats of the meetings could be different: workshops in various combinations between translators, authors, directors, actors and dramaturgs; also, small group meetings of people who create Web sites, or magazine editors, or agents and publishers.

Krisztina Baba stressed that, besides distributing information to theatre magazines, it was even more important to forward it to theatre practitioners since they were often not acquainted with such kind of activities.

Cipriana Petre suggested that foreign language students should be approached in each country and given the opportunity to get engaged on translating theatre pieces from

the language they were studying. This engagement would in turn be part of their university curriculum, possibly even part of their graduation exam.

Judith Herzberg informed on Poetry International meeting that took place every year in Holland. The structure of the meeting is that selected poetry of one poet or one poem is being translated to a number of languages by the participating translators. Herzberg proposed a similar model for a dramatic workshop, where one text would be previously roughly translated in many languages and then finished on the spot.

Vesa Tapio Valoa suggested that, until the next meeting, present participants should provide a list of playwrights, translators, directors and actors who could participate in such workshops and have a selection board that would choose among them. He also proposed that a more specific kind of reader could be generated, one that would be written from translators' point of view. Finally, he suggested that, instead of reprinting it, the reader should be put on the Internet and updated regularly.

Hugh Rorrison informed that a conference that gathered translators, directors, actors, etc. already existed in the UK and that it took place every two years in Hull.

Ray Brown said that the Yorkshire Playwrights' Association was in the process of creating a homepage. In his opinion, there was a strong possibility for Culture in Balance and the reader to become part of it.

Olafur Haukur Símonarson informed that ITI had decided last winter to create a homepage. *Tobias Biencomme* from Switzerland obtained the money from the Swiss government for this project and the homepage was due to open one of these days. It was conceived as an open field for everyone who wanted to place information on playwrights and their work subsidies possibilities, translations. Símonarson suggested that this could be a good spot for Culture in Balance homepage. He also added that the Union of Nordic Playwrights already had a homepage which could be a spot for Culture in Balance as well. He stressed that the cost of such an endeavour was very moderate and that almost any country could afford it. He took the responsibility of checking the possibilities of building a Culture in Balance homepage both in Scandinavia and in Switzerland.

As far as the issue of collaboration was concerned, Símonarson said that the ITI had worked on bilateral agreements for long-term collaboration. Iceland had one such agreement with Slovenia, Greece had one with Turkey, and it seemed they were well functioning.

Marian Popescu mused on the notion of borders, talking metaphorically of legal and illegal border crossings, on staying on one side of the border, on remaining somewhere in-between, right at the border. He also urged the participants to reflect more thoroughly on the notion of culture which was, in his opinion, neglected during this conference but was in many ways of crucial importance for understanding the similarities and differences among the nations. He proposed the formation of groups that would reflect upon these subjects and offered hosting it in Bucharest. He personally was working on promotion of foreign plays in Romania prior to this conference because he wanted to contribute to the dismantling of the nationalistic and xenophobic atmosphere that still prevailed.

Alja Predan stressed the importance of such meetings and gave them priority over any other kind of exchange of information. She also reminded that, apart from new plays and new directors that were in the focus of every meeting of this kind, there were still a lot of old plays written in "minor" languages that haven't reached the audience internationally.

Judith Herzberg remarked that, rather than talking about problems, there should be talk about possibilities. It would give a different perspective on the whole conference.

After doing a sobering overview of the pledges and suggestions that have been made in the first part of the session - assuming that many of them probably wouldn't be realized - **Ruud Engeland** stated that even a realization of a few of the pledges would be a great achievement: for instance, establishing a Website or/and the printing of the second edition of the reader. Stressing once again the importance of continuous networking, Engeland asked the participants to make suggestions on when should be the next meeting.

Vesa Tapio Valoa suggested that present participants should select other people for attending the next meeting since that would refresh and widen the network.

Ekaterina Salnikova thought that the meetings should be annual. In her opinion, based on her experience in Russia, things were changing quite rapidly and the developments were very intensive. To have an annual update would be an ideal timing for keeping the pace with events. She reminded that the goals of Culture in Balance should be on a smaller scale; only once those less ambitious goals would be achieved could one talk about big global moves.

Malgorzata Semil countered this opinion by stating that new playwrights didn't appear at such frequency and that one year was too a short time span. Yet, what would have to come under consideration of this conference would inevitably be the copyrights. This was an issue that should be discussed since there was no coherent policy on European level, especially not in Eastern Europe.

Alina Cadariu seconded Salnikova's proposal since she felt it had to do with a broader frame than playwrighting itself: it concerned theatre in its totality as well as the means of changing ways of thinking and doing things. In that sense, she offered to organize a new meeting in April of 1998 in Transsylvania as part of the Festival of New Playwrighting.

Hannah Hurtzig informed that the next edition of Bonner Biennale which would take place next year would have two performances less than usually; instead, a workshop for young playwrights and one for translators would be organized.

Goran Stefanovski who, together with Hurtzig, Dušan Jovanović and Judith Herzberg, started developing this new concept for Bonner Biennale during the conference, explained in more detail what was it about. Stefanovski said that the young writers workshop was envisioned as a "fast and furious" thing, with strong emphasis on practical and pragmatic issues rather than the theoretical ones. Each young playwright would be given the same crafty tasks, probably working together with dramaturgs and actors. The working languages would be, for the time being, English and German. Stefanovski further suggested that all authors of essays for the reader should make a kind of comparative analysis of their work now seen in the larger context of the whole reader. They should publish those analysis and also distribute them to other members of the network. Along with that, Stefanovski speculated that the essays could trigger a discussion on local level with possibly opposing views to the ones expressed in the text. He felt that such a discussion could be very fruitful and useful and thus should be stimulated.

Malgorzata Semil contributed to the series of pledges by promising that she would regularly update her report on Poland. She invited other authors to do the same thing. Thus the second edition would actually consist out of those updated reports and

its publishing might be a fairly simple endeavour. She also informed on the initiative that would take place in Poland from November 20-22. It is the Baltic Drama Fair which is conceived as a presentation of the dramatic activity in this region. A theatre critic would present the background of the theatrical situation in the Baltic states along with two or three playwrights from each country having their plays read in stage readings. Semil suggested that this would be a possible occasion for meeting again.

Ruud Engelder summarized the offers for next meeting which came from Romania, Latvia and Wales. He asked the proponents to discuss those offers on realistic basis with the organizers of the current Culture in Balance meeting.

Engelder began his final wrap-up with the question of actions that should be undertaken on European level. In that sense, European institutions and lobby organizations such as *EFAH* should be approached and informed on the Culture in Balance meeting and on its decision to form an informal network. He suggested that additional claims or proposals should be sent to those institutions. Engelder had formulated the ones that derived from the previous discussions. The total sum of ideas and suggestions was distilled down to four motions:

1. To further translations of plays written in "lesser known" languages into "bigger" as well as "smaller" ones for purposes of production or publication

2. To further the training of specialized drama translators from and into "small" languages

3. To further the exchange of information on European playwrighting by electronic and other means and through informal networks

4. To further events stressing the importance of European plays written in "lesser known" languages.

5. Cipriana Petre proposed an additional motion which concerned creating possibilities for training of professional promoters, especially regarding the needs of Central and Eastern European countries. She felt that, in spite of translations, the lack of trained promoters could be fatal for the process of distributing and promoting plays.

Lis Vibeke Kristensen added that it would be important to stress in the first motion that the demand for trilateral collaboration was an obstacle and that it should be changed to a bilateral one. **Engelder** argued that the idea was to initiate a new program within the EU and not to comment on the old one.

Since Engelder suggested the adjournment of the conference, **Hedda Kage** thanked the organizers and the hosting land in the name of all participants. She stressed that the discussions on the issues of theatre exchange on European level were of great importance. The idea on the criteria for successful intercommunication that was crystallized in the course of the conference was something that could serve as a starting point for everybody's future activities at home.

Ruud Engelder observed that the conference had began with big ideas and global views and, towards its end, it narrowed down to very practical and pragmatic questions. He found this a good and productive symptom, although the need for cultivating broader views and perspectives was complementary to it.

Together with **Dušan Jovanović**, Engelder adjourned the conference by thanking the organizational crew of Culture in Balance as well as the staff of hotel Austrotel where the whole conference took place. Engelder made a special thanks to Agatha Regeer from Theater Instituut Nederland for her extensive engagement in the entire Culture in Balance project. He also thanked Klaudija Zupan and Baiba Tjarve who worked on the preparation of the conference as international trainees in Theater

Instituut Nederland. Engeland addressed his final thanks to the participants, stressing the vital importance of their engagement for the conference.

Report written by:
Katarina Pejović

Ljubljana, 8.8.1997.



Evropski
Mesec
Kulture
European
Cultural
Month
Ljubljana
1997



Participants conference 'Culture in Balance - Texts Crossing Borders'
June 25-29, 1997, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Belgium

Vlaams Theater Instituut
Ms Ann Olaerts
Sainctelettesquare 19
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel.: +32.2.201 0906
Fax : +32.2.203 0205
E-mail : vti@gn.apc.org

director
author, reader

Vlaams Theater Instituut
Mr Geert Opsomer
Sainctelettesquare 19
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel.: +32.2.201 0906
Fax : +32.2.203 0205
E-mail : vti@gn.apc.org

critic

Min.van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap
Administratie Cultuur
Mr Kris van Haesendonck
Parochiaansstraat 15
1000 Brussel
Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 501 6889
Fax : +32 2 501 6901

adj.director

Ms Tanya Mlaker-Zurda
Kasteellaan 188
9000 Gent
Belgium
Tel.: +32 9 225 5023
Fax : +32 9 233 5391
E-mail : tanya.mlaker@unicall.le

director, dramaturg
translator, critic

Bulgaria

Ms Kamelia Nikolova
22A, Parchevich str.
Sofia 1000
Bulgaria
Tel.: +359 2 810 419
Fax : +359 2 980 2861

author reader

Czech Republic

Ms Helena Albertova
Divadelní Ustav
Celetná 17
110 01 Praha 1
Czech Republic
Tel.: +42 02 2481 2762
Fax : +42 02 2481 1452

author reader

Denmark

Ms Lis Vibeke Kristensen
Strindbergsvej 12
DK 2500 Valby Denmark
Tel.: +45 40 30 53 73
or
Södra Promenaden 25 A
21138 Malmö Sweden
E-mail : lvk@swipnet.se
or
Danish Literature Informations Centre
Amaliegade 38
Copenhagen Denmark
Agent:
Nordiska Strakosch
Gothersgade 9-11
DK 1123 Copenhagen Denmark

author reader

Estonia

Estonian Drama Theatre
Mr Andres Laasik
Pärnu mnt. 5
EE0001 Tallinn
Estonia
Tel.: +372 2 443 076
Fax : +372 2 445 003
Tel.: +372 2 53 68 66 (home)

author reader
critic

Estonian Drama Agency
Ms Külli Holsting
Suur-Karja 23
EE0100 Tallinn
Estonia
Tel.: +372 6 282 342
Fax : +372 6 282 344
E-mail : ena@teleport.ee

dramatic agent

Finland

Mr Vesa Tapio Valo
Helsinki City Theatre
Ensi Linja 2
SF-00530 Helsinki
Finland
Tel.: +358 9 394 0312/394 01
Fax : +358 9 394 0244
Tel.: +358 9 6854474 (home)

author reader
dramaturg, director

Germany

Soc.Theatre & Media Latinamerica
Ms Hedda Kage
Pfizerstr. 12
70184 Stuttgart
Germany
Tel.: +49 711 240 722
Fax : +49 711 236 0097

Bonner Biennale
Ms Hannah Hurtzig
Am Michaelshof 9
53177 Bonn Germany
Tel.: +49 228 820 8253/8254
Fax : +49 228 820 8133/8129
E-mail : biennale@bonn.de
or
Ms Hannah Hurtzig
Lottumstrasse 11
10119 Berlin Germany
Tel.: +49 30 448 2409
Fax : +49 30 449 4368

Hungary

Hungarian Theatre Museum & Institute author reader
Ms Anna Lakos
Krisztinakrt 57
1016 Budapest
Hungary
Tel.: +36 1 175 2372
Tel/fax: +36 1 175 1184
Tel/fax: +36 1 322 4080 (home)
E-mail : h 13847lak@ella.hu

Ministry of Culture dramaturg
Theatre Department theater secretary
Ms Krisztina Baba
Rákóczi út 68 II.14.
1074 Budapest
Hungary
Tel.: +36 1 311 4099
Fax : +36 1 302 3002
Tel.: +36 1 141 3014 (home)
E-mail : krisztina.baba.mkm.x400gw.itb.hu

Iceland

Mr Haukur Olafur Simonarson author reader
Spetalasteg 8 playwriht
101 Reykjavik
Iceland
Tel.: +354 552 7082
Fax : +354 552 7182

Mr Hallmar Sigurdsson
Smáragata 8a
101 Reykjavik Iceland
Tel/fax: +354 551 5351
E-mail : hallmar@ismennt.is

director

Ms Sigrun Valbergisdottir
Ránargata 20
101 Reykjavik
Iceland
Tel.: +354 551 9662
Fax : +354 552 4650

stage director

Italy

Mr Mario Prospero
Via Villa Emiliani 1 a
00197 Roma
Italy
Tel.: +39 6 321 9891
Fax : +39 6 361 1501

author reader
theatre director

La Loggia
Centro internazionale di
scrittura drammaturgica
Ms Justine Grou-Radenez
Via Collina 40
50020 Montefiridolfi
Florence Italy
Tel/fax: +39 55 824 4458
Fax : +39 55 824 4283

Kyrgyzstan

Mr Asanbekov Nurlan
34-20-10 Microregion
Bishkek Kyrgyzstan
Tel.: +996 3312 423 625/463 778
Fax : +996 3312 621 565
E-mail : almash@office.soros.bishkek.su

theatre director

Latvia

Ms Baiba Tjarve
Vesetas 10 - 25
Riga, LV-1013
Latvia
Tel.: +371 733 92 76
Fax : +371 732 56 64

author reader
critic

Valmiera Drama Theatre
Ms Ieva Zole
Lacplesa 4
Valmiera LV 4201
Latvia
Tel.: +371 42 31 563
Fax : +371 42 22 031

art.dir.assistent

Lithuania

Ms Elvyra Markeviciutė
Kaunos State Academic Drama Theatre
Laisves al. 71
3000 Kaunas
Lithuania
Tel.: +370 7 220 045/13 707
Fax : +370 7 207 693/13 707
Tel.: +370 7 716 143 (home)

dramaturg

Macedonia

Mr Goran Stefanovski
Bul.Jane Sandanski 86/6/V
91000 Skopje
Macedonia
Tel.: +389 91 413 728
Fax : +389 91 361 256
Tel.: +44 122 745 8236 (U.K.)

playwright

The Netherlands

Mr Rob Klinkenberg
Korte Prinsengracht 38 III
1013 GT Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel/fax: +31 20 622 2377

author reader
critic

Ms Judith Herzberg
Vondelstraat 75 A
1054 GL Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 618 2858

playwright

International Theatre & Film Books
Ms Miranda van 't Wout
Kleine-Gartmanplantsoen 21 VII
1017 RP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 625 5877/638 9329
Fax : +31 20 638 9329
E-mail : itfb@xs4all.nl

publisher

International Theatre & Film Books
Mr Emile Op de Coul
Kleine-Gartmanplantsoen 21 VII
1017 RP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 625 5877/638 9329
Fax : +31 20 638 9329
E-mail : itfb@xs4all.nl

publisher

Mr Dragan Klaić
Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 551 3300
Fax : +31 20 551 3303
E-mail : info@tin.nl

director

Mr Rudy Engeland
Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 551 3300
Fax : +31 20 551 3303
E-mail : info@tin.nl

Head Research &
Development

Mr Dennis Meyer
Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 551 3300
Fax : +31 20 551 3303
E-mail : info@tin.nl

Research &
Development
Youth theatre
Dramatic theatre

Ms Agatha Regeer
Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 551 3300
Fax : +31 20 551 3303
E-mail : info@tin.nl

Research &
Development
Internat. relations

Ms Sonja van der Valk
Theater Instituut Nederland
Herengracht 168
1016 BP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 20 551 3300
Fax : +31 20 551 3303
E-mail : info@tin.nl

Research &
Development
Theatre
Dramatic theatre

Norway

Mr Kristian Seltun
Lydersagensgate 12
5008 Bergen Norway
Magazine:
Box 1287
5001 Bergen Norway
Tel.: +47 55 329 126
Fax : +47 55 589 659
E-mail : kristian.seltun@kh.uib.no

author reader
critic

Norske Dramatikers Forbund
Mr Kjell Kristensen
P.O.Box 579, sentrum
0105 Oslo
Norway
Tel.: +47 22 411 344
Fax : +47 22 420 356

chairman

Mr Odd Selmer
Olav Kyrresgate 9 B
0273 Oslo
Norway
Tel.: +47 22 430 343/411 344
Fax : +47 22 420 356

playwright

Poland

Dialog
Ms Malgorzata Semil
Ul. Pulawska 61
02-595 Warsaw
Poland
Tel.: +48 22 455 583/455 475
Fax : +48 22 453 935
Tel/fax: +48 22 624 0201 (home)

author reader
critic
translator

Portugal

Mrs Maria Helena Serôdio
Av.Prof. Reinaldo dos Santos 13,8°,C
2795 Carnaxide
Portugal
Tel.: +351 1 418 2233
Fax : +351 1 417 6845
E-mail : helenaro546@mail.telepac.pt

author reader
critic
translator

Romania

UNITER/UNITEXT
Mr Marian Popescu
2-4 George Enescu Str.
R-70141 Bucharest
Romania
Tel.: +401 615 3636/613 4278/311 3214
Fax : +40 1 312 0913
E-mail : uniter@buc.soros.ro

author reader
critic, agent,
publisher

Dramafest
Ms Alina Cadariu
Str.Postei nr.2
4300 Targu-Mures
Romania
Tel/fax: +40 65 215 184

playwright
theatre critic
editor

Ms Cipriana Petre
Aleea Cimpul cu Flori 1
B1 OD2 Sc A Et1 Ap.5
Sector 6 cod 77408
Bucharest
Romania
Tel.: +40 1 777 4786
Fax : +40 1 312 3414

Russia

Ms Ekaterina Salnikova
p/o Moskovsky Nabludatel
Arbat 35
121835 Moscow Russia
Tel.: +7 095 248 2372/248 2866
Fax : +7 095 248 2372
home:
Fruktovaya Str. dome 3, A, 109
113556 Moscow Russia
Tel.: +7 095 316 98 03

author reader
critic

Ms Ksenya Dragunskaya
Karetny Ryad 5/10 - 205
103006 Moscow
Russia
Tel.: +7 095 299 9846
Fax : +7 095 143 9530

playwright

Mr Vladimir Kotov
6 Sovietskaya st. h.13, ap.7
St Petersburg
Russia
Tel.: +7 095 274 9020
Fax : +7 095 314 2501

president Akimov
theatre fund

Moscow Observer
Ms Natalia Iakoubova
Arbat 35
121835 Moscow
Russia

journalist

Slovenia

Mr Dusan Jovanović
Bohinjska Bela 103 A
4263 Bohinjska Bela
Slovenia
Tel/fax: +386 64 720 030

playwright, director

Ms Francka Slivnik
Slovenski gledaliski muzej
Mestni trg 17
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 210 142/212 728
Fax : +386 61 210 142
E-mail : francka.slivnik@guest.arnes.si

senior curator

Ms Klavdija Zupan
European Cultural Month
Copova 14
1000 Ljubljana Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 121 1140
Fax : +386 61 121 1144
home: Kamnik Pod Krimom 140
1352 Preserje Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 631 257

dramaturg
project coordinator

Mr Evald Flisar
Slovenian Writers Association
Tomsiceva 12
Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel/fax: +386 61 214 144
Tel.: +386 61 125 2340
home: Mlinska Pot 4
1231 Ljubljana Slovenia

playwright
translator

Ms Alja Predan
Mestno Gledališče Ljubljansko
Copova 14
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 125 8222
Fax : +386 61 217 044

dramaturg, translator

Janer Pipan
SNG Drama
Erjavceva 1
Ljubljana Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 126 4570
Fax : +386 61 223 885

director

Dusa Zdravko
Cankarjeva Založba Publishing House
Hribarjevo Nabrezje 13
1512 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 214 236
Fax : +386 61 214 250

publisher, translator

Petan Zarko
Beethovnova 4
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 210 024

playwright, director

Cankarjev Dom
Ms Natasa Kelhar
Presernova 10
61000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 125 8121
Fax : +386 61 224 229

head of arts agency

Mr Igor Lampret
Tavcarjeva 5
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
Tel.: +386 61 329 709

dramaturg, translator

Ms Katarina Pejovic
Luznarjeva 19
4000 Kranj
Slovenia
Tel/fax: +386 64 330 113
E-mail : march@kud-fp.si

Spain

Mr Ignacio Herrera de la Muela
Fundacion Olivar de Castillejo
c/ Menéndez Pidal 3 bis
28036 Madrid
Spain
Tel.: +34 1 359 7161
Tel/fax: +34 1 359 0133
or
Instituto Cervantes, Paris
7, Rue Avenir Bauchart
75008 Paris
France
Tel.: +33 1 407 092 92

author reader

Sweden

Mr Niklas Brunius
Riksteatern
145 83 Norsborg
Sweden
Tel.: +46 8 531 99 100/99 284
Fax : +46 8 531 83 012

author reader
dramaturg

United Kingdom

Aurora Metro Press
Ms Cheryl Robson
4 Osier Mews, Chiswick
London W 4 2 NT
U.K.
Tel.: +44 181 747 1953
Fax : +44 181 742 2925

publisher

Yorkshire Playwrights
Mr Hugh Rorrison
75 Grove Lane
Leeds LS6 4EQ
U.K.
Tel.: +44 113 278 4092
Fax : +44 113 233 3508
E-mail : rorrison@globalnet.co.uk

playwright

Yorkshire Playwrights
Mr Ray Brown
30b Spencer Place
Leeds LS7 4BR
U.K.
Tel.: +44 113 262 44 93
Fax : +44 113 262 27 66

playwright

Mr Ian Rowlands
Theatr y Byd
Unit 4, The Haltings
Cardiff
Wales
Tel.: +44 12 22 499 122
Fax : +44 12 22 455 320
Tel.: +44 12 22 345 765 (home)

writer, director

Mr Samuel Willcocks
10 Court Ord Road
Rottingdean
Brighton
Sussex BN2 7FD
U.K.

United States

Mr Per Schelde
10224 N82nd Street
Scottsdale, AZ 85258
U.S.A.
Tel.: +1 602 368 79 29
Fax : +1 602 368 79 39
E-mail : persche@swlink.com

actor, writer

Yugoslavia

Ms Aleksandra Jovicevic
Rankova 14
1000 Belgrad
Yugoslavia
Tel.: +381 11 456 588 (home)
Tel.: +381 11 135 684-89
Fax : +381 11 130 862

author reader



CULTURE IN BALANCE, TEXTS CROSSING BORDERS

June 25-29, 1997

Final programme

Wednesday, June 25

17.00 - 18.00 Registration at Hotel Austrotel
18.00 - 19.30 Welcome dinner at Hotel Austrotel
20.00 Performance

Thursday, June 26

09.00 - 10.00 Registration at Hotel Austrotel
10.00 - 10.15 Welcome
10.15 - 11.00 **Hey, you, can you hear me?**
Playwrights in small linguistic areas: a panel discussion with Judith Herzberg (The Netherlands), Goran Stefanovski (Macedonia) and Ólafur Haukur Símonarson (Iceland), chaired by Ann Olaerts (Belgium).
11.00 - 11.30 Coffee break
11.30 - 13.00 **And this is how it doesn't work in MY country!**
An analysis of the articles in the reader by Rob Klinkenberg (The Netherlands), the reader's editor.
13.00 - 14.30 Lunch
14.30 - 17.00 **This is what it means, but does it mean what I think?**
What happens to a text that travels from one country to another one?
An introduction by Dušan Jovanović (Slovenia), who will then chair a panel discussion about compatibility and universality, interrupted by a cup of tea, with Lis Yibeke Kristensen (Denmark), Anna Lakos (Hungary), Zanita Mirčevska (Macedonia) and Vesa Tapio Valoa (Finland).
19.00 and 22.00 Performances

Friday, June 27

10.00 - 11.30 **I only do this because it is my job!**
Publishers, agents, magazines, festivals, translators, critics: what do they do to make texts accessible in a different linguistic context?
With Alina Cadariu (Romania), Justine Grou-Radenez (Italy), Cheryl Robson (U.K.), Malgorzata Semil (Poland), chaired by Dragan Klaic (The Netherlands).
11.30 - 12.00 Coffee break
12.00 - 13.00 **Who's doing what where how anyway?**
Existing programmes and schemes to promote dramatic work in an international context.
A presentation by Baiba Tjarve (Latvia) and a discussion, chaired by Rudy Engeland (The Netherlands).
13.00 - 14.30 Lunch
14.30 - 16.00 Three working groups on the problems (and preferably: solutions!) surrounding this issue.
16.00 - 16.15 Tea break
16.15 - 17.00 Working group presentations
19.00 and 22.00 Performances

Saturday, June 28

10.00 - 13.00

What to do?

A general discussion about ways to maintain and improve our contacts, widen the circle, and exchange information. Coffee. Conclusions and presentation of future projects, chaired by Rudy Engeland.

13.00 - 14.30

Lunch

14.30 - 17.00

Individual meetings, video presentations

20.00

Performance

Sunday, June 29

And now for something completely different...

Trip by coach to Bled. Oxygen and lunch.

Poland

Polish Drama Today

Małgorzata Semil

Decades of censorship have contributed greatly to the fact that Polish theatre is mainly a directors' and actors' theatre. Under Communist rule, playwrights refrained from dealing directly with topical issues. Instead, they would resort to allusions, Aesopian language, metaphors and historical dress. In many cases, theatres shunned new plays altogether and staged works of great Polish classics of the Romantic period, and the turn-of-the-century modernists in such a way as to comment and reflect upon present day issues and using them in fact as a political platform. Theatre adopted a high moral tone, focussed on fundamental spiritual and intellectual values and assumed spiritual leadership. Pure entertainment seemed to be below its dignity.

In terms of style, apart from the very short period of socialist realism in the fifties, realistic, naturalistic or psychological drama never had a strong position in Poland. The dominant trend was that of the Grotesque, of surrealist imagination, of toying with form and breaking conventions. That style, rooted already in the Polish Romanticism, was represented in modern times by the pre-war avant-gardist Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939) and by Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969, in exile after 1939). Combined with an allusive style, it fitted very well with the wave of theatre of the absurd which reached Poland with the political thaw of 1956.

Two radically different (though equally ironic) Polish playwrights who made their debut in the late fifties were immediately classified as „absurdists”, and internationally recognized. They were Sławomir Mrożek (b. 1930) - short story writer and cartoonist whose plays are allegorical metaphors, and Tadeusz Różewicz (b. 1921) - a poet who through his poetic collages became the most biting critic of the Polish „small stabilization” of the 1960s. Over the years, both playwrights (who still remain active today) have been the twin pillars of the Polish theatre, breaking new ground in terms of form and responding to the nation's concerns. They voiced its fears, anxieties, frustrations and hang-ups and ridiculed its vices in a way which to anyone familiar with the Polish history and literary tradition is immediately recognized as „Polish”, being at the same time universal.

Mrożek's early plays *The Police*, *Striptease* and *Out at Sea*, were political parables exposing the communist regime and its absurdities, but at the same time gave expression to the absurdities of the world in a philosophical and universal sense. Later came *Tango*, an inquiry into the ineffectuality of the intellectual idealist as a ruler, a play which became even more topical with time. Of his later works *The Portrait*, *The Ambassador*, and - particularly - *The Emigrants* turned out to be statements of universal value. This is especially true of *The Emigrants*, a play which in Poland seemed to express most adequately the nation's specific conflicts (antagonism and symbiosis of intellectuals and the working class) and attitudes towards emigration, long a prominent issue of Polish literature.

Różewicz sets his plays in a more easily identifiable Polish context. He concerns himself with what he sees as the stultifying complaisance of contemporary Poland, bereft of all idealism. Różewicz satirizes the conditions of life which bear responsibility for the spiritual numbness of his generation, and endlessly questions the very possibility of the existence of art after the horrific experience of Auschwitz. This could be said of his first play *The Card Index* (1960) but even more so of *Do piachu...* (Dead and Buried - 1979), an exceptionally naturalistic play. Set in a partisan unit during World War II, the play debunks and mocks the national myths of bravery, heroism and sacrifice for the freedom of the country. But *Świadkowie, albo nasze mala stabilizacja* (Witnesses, or our Small Stabilization - 1962), an image of total spiritual ossification, *Stara kobieta wysiaduje* (The Old Woman Broods - 1968), *Białe małżeństwo* (White Marriage - 1974) or *Pułapka* (The Trap - 1982) in which Kafka's life story is invested with all the fears and obsessions that have been experienced in this century (also those, such as the Holocaust, that came after his death), are plays equally understandable and valid in Poland as elsewhere.

When the political system changed in 1989, one would have expected the tumultuous political events of the decade, such as martial law, and all the other hardships and conflicts which the nation experienced, to have some resonance in new dramatic output. Barely so. Plays dealing with the immediate past were few and far between. Either the shock was too strong, or real life proved to be far more dramatic and exciting than anything the theatre could offer. Also, after years of

camouflaging their thoughts and intentions, of twisting and contradicting all the rules in order to pass on an oblique message without getting in trouble with the censors, playwrights seemed to have great trouble writing simply and openly.

Still, a number of playwrights did gradually come to the public's attention and gained prominence. At least two of them should be mentioned: Janusz Głowacki and Tadeusz Słobodzianek.

Janusz Głowacki (b. 1938), well known in Poland as an author of essays, witty, ironic short stories, film scripts and plays, was stranded abroad when martial law was introduced in 1981. He settled down in the United States and worked his way to international recognition with two plays: *Połowanie na karaluchy* (Hunting Cockroaches -1986), an ironic and grotesque play in which a couple of Polish intellectuals struggles to survive in a roach-infested New York apartment, and *Antigona w Nowym Jorku* (Antigone in New York - 1992), undoubtedly one of the most important Polish plays of the nineties. The protagonists are New York's homeless: Anita, a simple Puerto Rican woman on the verge of madness, an extrovert Pole, dazzled by the American myth of success, full of primitive xenophobia and national megalomania, and a Russian-Jewish dissident painter. These dregs of society whose only place under the sun is now the Beckettian landscape of Tompkins Square Park, undertake a desperate attempt to bury the body of their beggar friend, the only person who showed Anita some consideration. Their need to overcome loneliness, create a community, to save their dignity, binds them together and sets them on a bizarre journey with a corpse (which probably isn't even the right corpse) through New York. Far from being melodramatic, the play speaks with affection and humour about the tragic fate of people condemned to loneliness.

Quite significantly, two of the most important contemporary Polish plays - *The Emigrants* and *Antigone in New York* deal with emigration. The question of whether to stay or leave the country, the sense of belonging, of identity, and the urge to look upon one's country and compatriots from a distance - seems to be one of the most frequent themes coming up in plays, especially those written during or immediately after martial law.

Tadeusz Słobodzianek (b. 1955) theatre critic and stage director, and most recently primarily a playwright, is perhaps the most interesting - and prolific - author of his generation. His first play was a tragicomedy *Obywatel Pekosiewicz* (Citizen Pekosiewicz - written in 1987 but withheld by the censor and performed only in 1989). It is a story of a simple, small-town man, a war orphan who in his miserable life owed just as much to the church, as to the party. Caught up unwittingly by the whirlwind of politics he becomes an innocent victim of a plan by power-hungry local officials to get ahead by identifying and thwarting the actions of an alleged agent provocateur, Pekosiewicz himself. This well-written play is probably one of the best examples of a genre which is quite popular among Polish playwrights, namely of politicized biographies of common people. Of course, it helps to know Poland's troubled modern history if one is to enjoy the satirical bite of such plays (since such is their predominant tone), or to sympathize with the tragic predicament of their heroes.

Other plays by Słobodzianek differ markedly from his debut. Concerned with such issues as the source of sin and morality in a world where all values and norms have disintegrated, he draws for material for his plays on folk myths, fables and beliefs, on a folk imagination where Christian religion is mixed with paganism, with primitive and natural reactions. He also uses to advantage such universal motifs as the Arthurian legend or the Faustian myth. Słobodzianek found a particularly rich source of inspiration in the history and folklore of North-Eastern Poland where the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches meet, where Polish and Bielarus cultures meet and mix.

Turlajgroszek (Roll-a-Pea - 1990) written in collaboration with Piotr Tomaszuk for a puppet theatre (which they headed together), is a morality play with a rich admixture of the folklore of the region. It speaks about such fundamental issues as fatherly and filial love, the renunciation of one's true self for money, the challenge of poverty, and finally sin and repentance.

Local themes and myths serve as basis for two more plays: a political tragi-farce *Czar Mikołaj* (Tsar Nicholas - 1897), and another morality play *Prorok Ilija* (Ilya, the Prophet - 1992). This last play is set in the period between the wars, in the backwoods where all the external influences, either administrative from Poland, political from the bolshevik Bielarus or those brought by Jewish peddlers, are transformed into the local concept of the world, into a grotesque deformation of reality. It tells the story of a man who believed that he had descended from heaven to judge the living and the dead. Since salvation is not possible without the passion and crucifixion, the deeply religious villagers decide to crucify him, and thus help him carry out his mission. After all, if they won't do it, someone else will!

Merlin (1993), a morality play based on motifs of the Arthurian legend, is probably the most mature and most complex of Słobodzianek's works. Its theme, in a word, is the impossibility of building a perfect kingdom on earth since evil is inherent in any divine plan.

Kowal Malambo (Malambo, the Blacksmith - 1993), is yet another morality play, designed for puppets and set in Argentina. The hero signs a pact with the devils and makes a journey in time, always playing tricks on them. However, when he is about to destroy them, Jesus Christ intervenes to save them. „The world was a paradise, before you, Jesus Christ came here, along with all these devils” - he concludes angrily.

Słobodzianek's language is a mixture of the colloquial, sometimes even vulgar, with highly poetic and ornamental elements. So, it does not easily lend itself to translation. Nevertheless, the performance of *Roll-a-Pea* by Towarzystwo Wierszalin, where it was originally staged, has enjoyed success in many countries, and *Ilija, the Prophet*, translated into German has been performed by Theater Kreatur in Berlin. *Merlin* has been translated into English.

A winner of a number of playwrighting competitions, Słobodzianek has won critical, but not necessarily popular acclaim. His plays have had very few productions: between 1994 and now, there have been only 5 (of all of his plays)

By contrast Bogusław Schaeffer (b. 1929), avant-garde composer, music critic and playwright, is one of the authors most frequently performed by Polish theatres. His plays, such as a series of five pieces under a common title *Audiencja (I, II, III, IV and V)*, *Tutam* (Herethere), *Próba* (Rehearsal), *Scenariusz dla 3 aktorów* (Script for 3 actors), *Scenariusz dla nieistniejącego, ale możliwego aktora instrumentalnego* (Script for a Nonexistent, but Possible Instrumental Actor), *Kwartet dla czterech aktorów* (Quartet for Four Actors), *Zorza* (Aurora) are witty conglomerates of situational and verbal clichés, stereotyped behaviour, puns and remarks about society and the nature of art. Their structure allows for endless improvisation and transformation and so makes them favorite vehicles for actors. When their frothy, witty substance is matched with equally spirited direction and acting, they become little gems. Schaeffer is probably the most „international” of Polish playwrights, provided that his linguistic gymnastics and neologisms are adequately rendered, and that is quite a tall order.

History has always been one of the main preoccupations of the Polish theatre. Władysław Terlecki (b. 1933), novelist and playwright, draws in his plays on his superb knowledge of the 19th century, when Poland was partitioned and fought for freedom. For his subject-matter, he chooses situations where there is a tragic crossing of individual fortunes and events through which it is possible to show the universal laws of human behaviour, to raise moral issues, such as loyalty, the value of human life, the right to kill in the name of a higher cause. Many of his plays are adaptations of his own novels, which accounts for the fact that they are often straight, discursive dramas. *Dwie głowy ptaka* (Two Heads of a Bird), *Cyklop* (The Cyclops), *Odpocznij po biegu* (Rest after Running), are among the best. His works are regularly performed by theatres and television.

Tomasz Łubieński (b. 1933) essayist and poet, himself an expert on the 19th century, also likes to set his plays in that period amongst the timeless problems symbolically summarized in the title of his book of historical essays: *To Fight or Not to Fight?* (which in Polish sounds almost the same as „To be or not to be?”; for that matter in Polish history it meant exactly the same) or, as in his dramatic miniature *Historia z psem* (Story with a Dog - 1989) : „to leave or to stay?” Unlike Terlecki's work, however, his plays have a very elaborate form, his stage directions are a peculiar kind of prose, while the turns of the plot are merely implied, contours are blurred and ambiguous. His plays have been performed very seldom and not always with great success: obviously his theatrical vision - and he is one of the few playwrights who not only write dialogue but have a distinct theatrical vision - has yet to meet with an equally visionary director. His most recent playlet *Śniadanie do łóżka* (Breakfast in Bed - 1993) is ostensibly realistic and, for a change, set in the present, in a pension earlier reserved for dignitaries. The plot revolves around two „mutually unfaithful couples” who spend the night there. One of the women is plagued by hang-ups and aspires to high society; the other is a society lady with a partner belonging to the „new elite”. The piece is much more than a comedy of manners - it implicates a sad truth, that however the system has changed, but the mentality of the people remains the same.

One of the most interesting plays of the last fifteen years is a piece written in 1985 by Tadeusz Bradecki (b. 1955), actor and theatre director. *Wzorzec dowodów metafizycznych* (Equation of Metaphysical Proof) takes up the subject of the crisis of modern European thought, the dehumanization of our world. It deals with the very source of ideas that the world can be fully comprehended and controlled, and governed, planned and organized down to the last detail, and that therefore society can be moulded toward a vision, toward a goal. This very serious theme is presented in the form of delightful stage entertainment, with songs, dances and witty, humorous philosophical discussions very much in the spirit of Voltaire. Its full title is very long and says a lot

about its subject and form: *Equation of Metaphysical Proof, or the Final Solution of the Diabolical Question, or the Tragic History of Doctor Faustus Written Anew and Readied for the Stage by Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz to Greet at Bad Pyrmont Spa the Emperor of All Russia, Peter the First Romanov, as Performed by William Schilling's Anglo-Saxon Strolling Players on June 7, 1716 A.D.* It is a play within a play, a recreation of a performance of a play by Leibnitz that was given by Schilling's troupe. This witty and intelligent drama is more universal than any other Polish play, but was staged only twice, both times with great success, by the author himself.

The works of playwrights mentioned here are those which stand out among the plays recently written. In terms of sheer volume, many more plays are written now than ever before. Nearly 400 plays were entered in a recent national playwrighting competition, while only a little over 40 were submitted during the previous one, held in 1993. However, quantity does not always turn into quality.

During the last two seasons at least three playwrights have attracted attention and been hailed as „promising”. What is important is that their approach is clearly contemporary, that they have a clear identity and represent a type of drama which is rarely seen on Polish stages.

Ewa Lachnit (b. 1957), film director, won this year's playwrighting competition. She has two plays to her credit: *Człowiek ze śmieci* (Man of Rubbish - 1996) and *Obrażeni* (The Offended Ones - 1997).

Man of Rubbish takes place in a landscape of slag heaps, a few defoliated trees, under a grimy sky, where somewhere „on the other shore” there are shiny new houses. This could very much be the landscape of any contemporary industrial area. People are divided between the inhabitants of the rubbish heap and the „glass people”. Those from the rubbish heap, the persecuted pariahs, are obsessed with the idea of getting across and secretly try to build a raft to do so. Among them are professors who make a living by digging graves, and crafty leaders of the revolt. The only hope of escape - and this can be done only once, since afterwards repression will follow - is to retrieve an enormous snake which has clogged the sewage system and to persuade it to haul the raft to the other shore. Societies on both sides are portrayed as corrupt and demoralized, but both are linked by numerous ties. To survive one needs to know the bizzare ground rules. The play is a cross between a comic strip and a mythical story, a fairy tale struggle of good against evil, as in some of the inane contemporary films. But there is also a bit of Kafka, a bit of Bulgakov and a bit of Mrożek in the play, perhaps also a bit of the black humour of Roland Topor's grotesque. A few years ago, it would be quite naturally treated as a picture of the disintegrating political system. Today, its bizzare world has much broader implications.

Lachnit's later, prize-winning play contains a similar image of conflicting societies and their internal rules though the setting is much less outrageously fantastic.

Marek Bukowski (b. 1960), an electrical engineer, has published three novels and written one play. On the surface his play *Ciałopalenie* (Holocaust - 1996) is a simple thriller: in a small town an elderly woman, a retired teacher, active in the local church charity, is involved in a hit-and-run accident and disappears afterwards. The victim dies. As they look for her, her sons and the police gradually discover that she was Jewish and worked in the secret police after World War II, and that the victim had probably blackmailed her. Another version, promoted by local „patriots” is that he was a Resistance fighter during the war and was later persecuted by the woman. However, nothing is certain here. Each scene brings a new element and a new twist to the story. The two characters who never appear on the stage, and whose biographies have been entwined since the war, serve as a pretext to show a contemporary Polish provincial society as a microcosm with all forms of political opportunism, nationalism, latent anti-Semitism. There is a deep ironic tone to the apparently realistic story. Performed by one of Warsaw's theatres, it caused quite a violent storm of criticism from the right-wing press. It is unique in its directness and courage.

Młoda śmierć (Young Death - 1995), three miniatures written by Grzegorz Nawrocki (b. 1949), a journalist, has provoked a lot of debate. Nawrocki dramatized three criminal cases in which juveniles were involved. The young people are shown as totally amoral, as completely unaware of the gravity of their deeds. They could be described as suffering from social autism. The drastic nature of the subject-matter is strengthened by the limited „tape-recorder” dialogue of the characters. This kind of directness and drastic subject matter is something new in Polish playwrighting, but obviously of universal interest. The play premiered in Szczecin and has since been performed in Spain.

*

The Polish audience shows little interest in contemporary Polish plays. Theatre companies are not eager to stage them, even though deliberate attempts are made by the authorities to support the performance of Polish plays (for three years now, the company which wins an annual competition for staging a new Polish play receives a full reimbursement of the production costs; other contestants get 30-50% of the costs). The reason lies in our consciousness, in the cultural tradition shaped under the pressure of Romantic ideas and defining the hierarchy of literary and theatrical achievements. Another reason may be called „the masterpiece complex.” Since plays of the Romantics and Neo-Romantics stand at the peak of prestige, this fact also influences the prestige of current artistic undertakings. The genius of the great author rubs off on the director who additionally can leave his/her own imprint on a masterpiece. Even if the director fails to do full justice to the work, he/she is usually held in higher esteem than someone who created a good production of a contemporary play. It is no wonder that there are more flawed versions of difficult classics than well-made productions of the simplest contemporary works. The press is not without blame, either. Critics usually do not treat new Polish plays with the same seriousness as they treat others.

Drama Repertoire of Polish Theatres and Television

Polish Plays			Foreign Plays		
Year	Classical	Contemporary (post-1945)	Year	Classical	Contemporary (post-1945)
Theatres and Television			Theatres and Television		
1994	50	59	1994	45	80
1995	79	109	1995	134	121
1996	76	92	1996	139	103
1997	22	45	1997	34	23
Puppet Theatres + Childrens' TV Theatre			Puppet Theatres + Childrens' TV Theatre		
1994	16	18	1995	21	7
1994	13	38	1995	23	11
1996	23	34	1995	34	11
1997	4	14	1997	3	6
Musical Theatres			Musical Theatres		
1994	1	1	1994	18	5
1995	-	4	1994	29	15
1996	2	7	1996	41	9
1997	3	-	1997	8	3

1997 - as of the end of May.

Is there a chance for change in this respect? Perhaps. There is a growing hunger for contemporary topics. Maybe also because there are fewer remarkable productions of old plays.

On the other hand, there is virtually no tradition of collaboration between playwrights and directors. Directors actually prefer the playwrights to be dead, because living ones can be a nuisance and object to the director's ideas (it is not without reason Mrożek that added „10 commandments” to *Love in the Crimea* precisely in order to prevent directors from meddling with his text)

As for the question if Polish plays „travel” well, it must be remembered that there is a world of difference between their possible reception in post-communist countries and in Western countries. A similar experience and in many cases the similarity of language have made Polish plays quite easily understood and as topical in the rest of the communist countries as at home. However, since Poland generally enjoyed more freedom than most other communist countries, Polish plays tended to be more outspoken - and often banned by the local censorship. Such was for instance the case of *The Trap* by Różewicz in Czechoslovakia, with many plays by Mrożek in Russia and the Baltic Republics.

In Western countries Polish plays were judged on merit, and of course the interest in Polish authors varied from country to country. Certain literary agencies and play publishers - especially in Germany and England - have always had an open eye for the Polish scene and continue to watch it carefully. Now, as before, the list of authors who generate interest is very short and more or less the

same in the West and in the East: Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Mrożek and Różewicz, Głowacki, and Schaeffer, and most recently also Słobodzianek.

Regular meetings of theatre professionals and translators at the festival of contemporary plays in Wrocław were very helpful in promoting Polish plays, especially in the communist countries. They were a good opportunity for translators to get acquainted with the newest Polish plays.

Agencja Autorska (The Authors' Agency) kept translators informed of new developments and offered them complimentary subscriptions of the monthly „Dialog”. The contacts then established still exist and faithful translators remain in touch with their authors, but the regular structure does not really function any longer. This accounts for the fact that the circle of Polish playwrights known abroad has not been extended very much in recent years.

Unfortunately, Agencja Autorska whose function was - among others - to promote and represent Polish authors abroad has suffered badly during the transformation (read: commercialization) process. What is left of it now, is only a small section of ZAiKS, in fact a right management agency and its function is limited to that kind of activity. A number of authors are now being represented by foreign agents or to new Polish agents whose professionalism is rather questionable.

Very little is now being done to popularize Polish playwrights abroad. New plays are introduced in the form of a critical synopsis in English and in French in the quarterly „Theatre en Pologne/Theatre in Poland” published by the Polish Centre of ITI. „Dialog” publishes one or two Polish plays every month - in Polish. One of the biggest obstacles is, of course, the language. For promotional reasons plays should be translated into widely spoken languages, such as English, French or German, but this is not being done for lack of funds. The Ministry of Culture has become quite active in supporting drama by organizing two competitions: a playwrighting competition and a competition for best performance of Polish play. However, it is not involved in any promotional activity. Some authors arrange translations of their plays on their own, in the hope that this might open up new prospects abroad for them.

*

ZAiKS,
ul. Hipoteczna 2
00-092 Warszawa
Fax # 48 22 635 13 47; 635 15 63

„Dialog”
ul. Puławska 61
02 - 595 Warszawa
Ph. # 48 22 45 54 75; 45 55 83
Fax # 48 22 45 39 35

Polish Centre of ITI - „Theatre en Pologne/Theatre in Poland”
Plac Piłsudskiego 9
00-076 Warszawa
Ph. # 48 22 826 17 71; 826 30 27