

The article analyses Slovenian-Macedonian exchange in the field of drama, which seems to be a moderate one. In the period from 1990 till 2015, there were six Macedonian texts staged in Slovenian institutions and eight Slovenian ones in Macedonian theatres. Furthermore, contemporary Slovenian authors are completely absent from Macedonian theatre life and Macedonian ones are represented with three names only. Though it might seem to be a natural decline after the fall of Communism and the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, this seems to be only partly the case.

Keywords: Slovenian drama, Macedonian drama, Slovenian-Macedonian theatre exchange, Goran Stefanovski, Aleksandar Popovski, Dušan Jovanović, Drago Jančar, Dane Zajc

Polite Ignorance

The Exchange of Drama between Slovenia and Macedonia from 1990 till 2015

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When we speak of Slovenian-Macedonian exchange in the field of drama it seems to be a moderate one and mainly a one-way road. In the period from 1990 till 2015, six Macedonian texts were staged in Slovenian institutions and eight Slovenian ones in Macedonian theatres. Though it might be a natural decline after the fall of Communism and disintegration of former Yugoslavia, this seems to be only partly the case.

Macedonian playwrights are almost unknown to the Slovenian audience. The *Web Yearbook of Slovenian Theatre Production* lists three texts by Kole Čašule (*Vejka na vetrot*, 11 December 1957, Ptuj City Theatre, directed by Mirko Stefanovski; *Socialistična Eva*, 7 December 1962, Ljubljana City Theatre, directed by Jože Tiran; *Vitel*, 23 February 1978, Slovene Permanent Theatre in Trieste, directed by Ljubiša Georgijevski). In the 1980s, those three texts were followed by two by Goran Stefanovski (*Let vo mesto*, 14 March 1983, Celje People's Theatre, directed by Mile Korun; *Hi-fi*, 6 October 1983, Ljubljana City Theatre, directed by Zvone Šedlbauer).

After the 1980s, there is a gap of fifteen years till the next performance of Macedonian drama. It returns with Goran Stefanovski (*Bacchanalia*) in the production of the final year students of the Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television (15 May 1998, directed by Sebastijan Horvat). It took five years longer for a Macedonian text to be staged in a professional theatre. However, it is the introduction of a new author, Dejan Dukovski, with his *Dracula* (18 January 2002, the Drama of SNT Maribor, directed by Aleksandar Popovski). Interestingly enough, it is the only text by Dukovski that has been staged in Slovenian so far. The question remains why Dukovski's most important texts, such as *Powder Keg* (1994)¹, a play which has been translated into twenty languages worldwide; *Damn He Who Started It* (1997), winner of the Grand Prix of the international theatre festival BITEF in 1997; *The Balkans Are Not Dead* (1992), have failed to find their place on the repertoire of the Slovenian theatre stages. Moreover, one of the best Macedonian playwrights, very important for the development of the Macedonian dramaturgy in the 1990s, Yugoslav Petrovski (an author of the same generation as Dejan Dukovski), winner of the Shakespeare Award

¹ *Powder Keg* was staged in the off-scene by Dejmo stisnt teater in 1998.

at the international drama competition in Exeter, Great Britain in 1995 for his play *Porcelain Vase*, has never been staged in Slovenia. Till today, four more texts have appeared in Slovenia, two by Goran Stefanovski (*Odyssey*, 10 October 2012, the Drama of SNT Maribor, directed by Aleksandar Popovski; and *Figurae Veneris Historiae*, 16 October 2014, SNT Drama Ljubljana, directed by Aleksandar Popovski), and two by Viktorija Rangelova (*An Impossible Relationship*, ŠKUC on 28 December 2012, and *Naked*, ŠKUC and Ljubljana City Theatre, 12 October 2013, directed by Alen Jelen)².

Hence, it is evident that Macedonian drama is virtually non-existent in Slovenian theatre. After a long pause, there were some attempts, particularly by director Aleksandar Popovski, to establish Goran Stefanovski in our consciousness, but with moderate success.

Slovenian drama in Macedonia reveals a different picture. It had a solid presence in the last decade of Yugoslavia. In the past, Ivan Cankar was very much present in Macedonian theatre; from 1945 till 1976 he had two texts performed in seven productions (*The King of Betajnova*: 1946 in Skopje, MNT and in Bitola; 1954/55 in Prilep; 1950 and 1962 in Strumica; *Scandal in the Valley of St Florian*: 1976 in Strumica and in Skopje – in a very short time period). In the 1980s, there were eight texts staged by five different authors, one of them (*My Dad, the Socialist Kulak* by Tone Partljič) even twice. This means that the Macedonian audience must have had quite an overview of Slovenian contemporary drama, having seen: *Karamazovs* and *Military Secret* by Dušan Jovanović; *My Dad, the Socialist Kulak* by Tone Partljič; *Slovene Sauna* and *The Wedding* by Rudi Šeligo; *The Great Brilliant Waltz* and *Klement's Fall* by Drago Jančar; and *Medea* by Dane Zajc.

After 1990, the situation seems at first glance to have not changed much. The repertoire records eight texts by Drago Jančar, Dušan Jovanović, Dane Zajc, Josip Vandot, Andrej Rozman and Tina Kosi. When we look closely, however, the picture changes significantly. Three of those were adaptations (*Kekec and Mojca* by Josip Vandot was an adaptation of a movie scenario, *Tartif (Tartuffe)* was an adaptation by Andrej Rozman Roza of the well-known Molière play, and Tina Kosi wrote her *Metamorfoze (Metamorphoses)* as an adaptation of a selection of stories by Ovid). Furthermore, the majority of performances took place at the beginning of the 1990s: Jančar's *The Great Brilliant Waltz* in 1990, Zajc's *Medea* in 1991, Jovanović's *Antigone* in 1993, and *The Liberation of Skopje* and *The Life of Provincial Playboys* in 2002.

It seems thus that the interest for Slovenian playwrights took momentum in the 1980s and almost ceased to exist at the beginning of a new millennium, thus leaving out all contemporary authors who entered the scene after 1990 (for example, Matjaž Zupančič, Vinko Möderndorfer, Evald Flisar, Simona Semenič ...).

² There was another reading performance of a play *Sophie's Picture (Sofijina slika)* by Maja Stevanović. It was performed on the festival Preglej na glas! 2007 on 5 December 2007.

What are the reasons behind these figures? Where were the texts staged, how were they received by theatre professionals? These are the questions that we want to discuss further in this article. We will do it by analysing the plays staged in Macedonia and Slovenia respectively from 1990 till 2015. Furthermore, we will analyse reviews and thus try to describe the reception and think of possible reasons for the ignorance in our title.

Before we can dig into our matter, we need to mention a particular author. Žanina Mirčevska, a dramatist of Macedonian origin who was also educated in Macedonia, but later emigrated to Slovenia where she works as an author, dramatist and in the last years as a professor at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana. She was awarded the Slavko Grum Award for the best new Slovenian play in 2009 for *The End of Atlas* and she has collaborated in 43 performances in Slovenian professional theatres. Žanina Mirčevska is thus analysed as a Slovenian author of Macedonian origin, as she is writing in Slovenian language and she lives and works in Slovenia. Furthermore, she has been accepted into the Slovenian literary canon by winning the Grum Award for her play. It is surprising that only two texts written in Slovene language have been staged in Macedonia (*The Gorge* in Dramski teatar Skopje in 2013 and *A Place I've Never Been* in NT Vojdan Cernodrinski, Prilep, both directed by the same director, Zoja Buzalkovska). Furthermore, in Macedonia there is no book with collected plays by Žanina Mirčevska. She is present only in some anthologies. Therefore, most of her plays are not accessible to the public.

Plays will be analysed in two groups (Slovenian drama staged in Macedonia and Macedonian drama staged in Slovenia). Žanina Mirčevska stands between these two groups as we consider her to be a Macedonian and Slovenian author at the same time, therefore, it seems that neither the Slovenian nor Macedonian audience considers her to be a foreign playwright. Within each group, the analysis follows the chronological order of the performances.

Drago Jančar: *The Great Brilliant Waltz*

Written in 1985, it was immediately staged at both national theatres in Slovenia (SNT Drama Ljubljana, 6 March 1985, directed by Zvone Šedlbauer; the Drama of the SNT Maribor, 8 March 1985, directed by Peter Veček) and published by Cankarjeva založba. Its main theme sees history and the social system as a substitute for destiny that crushes an individual, to be more precise, an intellectual. *The Great Brilliant Waltz* presents the re-education of the historian Simon Veber, who, after a night on the booze, finds himself in a mental institution with a telling name: Freedom liberates (an allusion to signs over Nazi concentration camps "Arbeit macht frei"). Simon is to be re-educated into Simon

Drohojowski, a Polish rebel, whom Veber is studying at the moment.

Simon resists all attempts by Doctor to persuade him into being Drohojowski, which is why male nurse Volodja takes the initiative. Using brutal force, he cuts off Simon's leg, thus actually transforming Simon into Drohojowski, and takes control of the institution.

It is thus the brutal force of the system that transforms individuals into shapeless, impersonal carnal forms with no values, ethics, or morals. At the end, we see a grotesque scene of a dance, where inmates, completely crushed and apathic, dance to the Chopin's *Great Brilliant Waltz*, an example of romantic emotions and a lust for freedom.

The first performance of this play on the Macedonian professional theatre stage dates back to 1985 (directed by Branko Stavrev), the same year it was written and staged on the boards of Jančar's native, national scene. It shows that the main theme of this play was quickly recognised in the wider social context and confirms the immediate connection between the professional theatre workers who worked and lived in Yugoslavia. The second performance of *The Great Brilliant Waltz* in Macedonia happened in 1990, directed by Stojan Stojanoski. The 1990s were marked by significant economic, political and social crises. The years after the fall of the Berlin Wall built lots of other walls in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was a time of wars and political disturbance, the time of organising referendums for independence in Slovenia and Croatia. If the first performance in 1985 somehow suggested the end of the world that existed, the second one was staged in the middle of the creation of another world that was fragile in its search for freedom. And staging this play in such real madness could be good timing, but it could also pass by unobserved, as it happened with the performance in 1990. Maybe it just was not a good time for metaphors.

Dane Zajc: *Medea*

Dane Zajc wrote his *Medea* in 1988 and it premièred at the Celje People's Theatre (9 December 1988, directed by Franci Križaj). The next season, it was restaged in SNT Drama Ljubljana (6 January 1990, directed by Meta Hočevar), as well as in Zagreb (Croatian National Radio) and Skopje (Skopje Drama Theatre, Budva, directed by Vito Taufer), both 1989. Zajc took the end of the Medea myth and pictured the rise and fall of Jason to the throne of Iolcus. It was Medea who helped him to kill Pelias, the king of Iolcus. Later, Jason's family has to flee the kingdom of Iolcus, because they are condemned and prosecuted by Acast, Pelias's son.

Jason and Medea want to run away from their destiny by getting married by Kirka,

though Medea sees their dark future. At the end, Jason falls in love with Glauce, the daughter of Creon, who gives protection to the fugitives in Corinth. Jason sees his love as his destiny but neglects to realise his debt to Medea. She is driven by jealousy to murdering her own children and Glauce. The final scene is thus a variation of the beginning. Jason is coming to Iolcus again, however, this time he is only the shadow of a former hero. He carries his sons and his wife on his shoulders, and Acast, who was seeking his revenge before the Corinth, cannot see Jason in this feeble body.

Acast: You have not been Jason and you will never be. (Zajc 436)

Later, he surrenders him to his sisters, the daughters of Pelias.

The story of this play in Macedonia shows an interesting case of staging a play, as it had four premières. The first one was in Budva in 1989, the second one in Ohrid, staged on the occasion of the Ohrid Summer Festival, then in Skopje in Drama Theatre in 1991 and again in Ohrid in 1991. In fact, the ensemble was always the same. What changed was the setting. The director Vito Taufer experimented with the scenic space and scenography and that gave new directions of the play. We do not have any information about how long this play was on the repertoire in Drama Theatre in Skopje, so we cannot even say how many spectators may have seen it, or how the public received it. There are only two reviews about the performance in Ohrid and both are enthusiastic about the reception of the play: "it was crowded and most of the people had to stand to watch the play or sit on the ground". The play was defined as a "ritual – spectacle" and compared to the performances directed by Paolo Magelli and Ljubiša Ristić (Petreski 9). The reviews were positive about the way of acting defining it as a "collective and balanced".

Dušan Jovanović: *Antigone*

The 1990s were marked by the change of the political and economic system in Slovenia as well as by the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The latter led to a series of wars or intensive conflicts between neighbours of different nationalities. Slovenia was the first to gain independence and the conflicts there were relatively mild, as they lasted only ten days. The tragedy began afterwards in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. The loss of the larger cultural space of Yugoslavia as well as the war influenced a number of plays by Slovenian authors. Perhaps the most complex is the trilogy *Antigone*, *The Puzzle of Courage* and *Who is Singing Sisyphus?* by Dušan Jovanović. The three plays premièred at the SNT Drama Ljubljana from 1993 till 1997, when they were also published by Cankarjeva založba.

Antigone (SNT Drama Ljubljana, 15 October 1993, directed by Meta Hočevar) is based on the myth of Oedipus and his sons. Jovanović took the myth as a symbol of the

Balkan wars in former Yugoslavia. The main question asked by Sphinx is thus: "How can Polyneices rule over the city without Eteocles losing it?" (Jovanović, *Balkan* 19).

The question stays unanswered till the end and the conflict escalates to an orgiastic Elimination, as Jovanović entitled this scene. Eteocles and Polyneices comment on their actions as sport reporters until they are both dead and Creon finally takes the throne. Antigone is the one who might have redeemed the city with her love and forgiveness, however, she cannot act before both her brothers are dead. Her burial of Polyneices of course leads to the condemnation and punishment of Creon, the statesman. It is notable that Creon, a politician and a symbol of rational power, cannot comprehend why the violence has to end: "I do not understand why hatred should all of a sudden vanish from the face of the Earth!" (37) And when Antigone insists on the simple fact that the plague should be no longer, he retorts: "What bullshit is this!" (Ibid.)

Antigone is sentenced to death and taken away by the guards, however, Eteocles and Polyneices cannot find peace. Jocaste lifts them up and they have to mime the whole fight that seems to be going on over and over again. It is a depressing image that resonates in the final lines given to the Old Woman (played by the same actor as the Sphinx) who tells fortunes from human excrement: "It is a shame. Too bad, your shit was so promising. Oh God, it was beautiful. There hasn't been better looking shit in all of Thebe!" (39) The final revelation to Antigone and Ismene alike: "You are pregnant! And you are pregnant too!" (Ibid.) can be understood as hope for the future or as an indication of the never-ending conflict.

If the staging of *The Great Brilliant Waltz* comes as a prophecy, *The Liberation of Skopje* is a flashback to the recent past and the consequences of the war, the staging of *Antigone* in 1993, is a perfect definition of the *here and now* theory on the power of the theatre. It is theatre that is firmly integrated in its society. With its action situated in Sarajevo, the play was not only happening in the theatre in Kumanovo (staged in the National Theatre Kumanovo, on 16 October 1993, it was also performed at the Week of Slovenian Drama in 1994) or in Kranj, but it was *happening* in Sarajevo while it was played in the theatres, and this gave the performance the possibility to exist on more than one level. It functioned even as meta-theatre, if we remember the phrase "all the world is a stage". Jovanović made an excellent move by adopting the old myth and transferring it from Thebe to Sarajevo in the present, which was immediately recognised as a crisis to be represented by the theatres in the countries, which were part of Yugoslavia. The theme of the eternal fight between two brothers resonates in the ethnic tensions between the city's two different nationalities that once lived together well, without the need to point a gun at each other. Eight years after the performance in Kumanovo, the last major ethnic conflict will erupt into violence in the territory of Macedonia.

Dušan Jovanović: *The Liberation of Skopje*

The Liberation of Skopje is probably the best and most often staged drama by Dušan Jovanović. He wrote the piece in 1976 and 1977. It premièred in SNT Drama Ljubljana on 7 November 1978, directed by Ljubiša Georgijevski, and was translated into six different languages. It was staged in all parts of former Yugoslavia as well as in the UK. The drama is constructed out of fragmented memories of a then-six-year old Zoran in the last months of World War II in Skopje. It is an autobiographical play that goes beyond the author's memories in order to explore the theme of the impact of historical events on an individual. These events take the form of destiny that shapes the protagonists' lives. So, we can observe a complex family life with the partisan Dušan, Zoran's father, who is absent and only arrives at the end as a liberator; members of the resistance in Skopje, like his uncle Georgij, who is brutally tortured by the Bulgarian secret police, etc. In contrast, there are a number of women protagonists, who try to survive in difficult circumstances. Lica, Zoran's mother, thus prostitutes herself with a German officer in order to get food for her children and the whole family, while his aunt Lenče is giving piano lessons to a Jewish girl who is deported in the middle of the play. Life is pictured as far more complex than it was presented by the official ideology after the war. One of the most illustrative scenes is Act 3, Scene 5, entitled "Orgy". We see the flat of Zoran's family, in which his mother is dancing half-naked for the German officer, the Doctor is dictating to Lenče a list of provisions sent to the Partisan army in the basement, Grandma Ana is smoking one cigarette after the other, next to her is her son Georgij, completely ruined by the torture, drunk and singing a traditional Macedonian song. Zoran is observing all this, unable to grasp the meaning of all the antagonisms.

No wonder that his friend Crazy Vavo in Act 3, Scene 8 reveals the truth of a lost generation, saying to Zoran and his friends:

Vavo: You brats, you'll never be happy! You've seen too much and understood too little. You've experienced too much and lived too little. (Jovanović, "The Liberation" 75)

Furthermore, at the end, Jovanović makes a statement about his generation to the generation of his father, the liberators and founders of the former Yugoslavia. At the end of the play, he explains his nightmare to his father Dušan:

Zoran: One night I woke up at three o'clock from a peaceful sleep, without the shadow of a dream. I was woken by some unexpected realization: I felt I have suddenly discovered the meaning of my life. At first, it was like the soft, gentle transformation of blood into clotting mud. Starting in the tiniest blood vessels at the extremities of my body; under my nails, in my toes, my lips, at the bottom of my nose. Then the coagulation spread through all my veins.

At this very moment, I had a peculiar feeling that I could destroy this experience, annul it, and wipe it out. By disappearing. By flying away. By coming unstuck and leaving behind the trammels of my body. The capillary vessels in my brain became filled with this clotted blood and the neurons began to die one after the other. Then the arteries hardened, the hearty stopped, died and burst in a great milky jet which spurted out and filled all space. ("The Liberation of Skopje" 76)

The last line belongs to Dušan: "My son, I don't understand you." (Ibid.)

The resistance, the heroic, mythic act of socialist authorities, is depicted as a problematic one, the results and traumas of WWII being the main legacy of the next generation. The text was written, published and staged at the end of the 1970s when Tito's power was diminishing, and national conflicts were rising again. It was the time when intellectuals felt an urge to renegotiate the limits of freedom of speech and the very foundations of the socialist ideology. They met some opposition from the authorities, but mainly the plays were allowed to be staged, which gained them high popularity and even created the impression that they helped to bring down the system at the end of the 1980s.

The Liberation of Skopje had three performances in Macedonia, two in Skopje (1978, 2002) and one in Shtip (1979). The story is situated in Skopje, the city where Jovanović (and Zoran, the character in the play) lived when he was six. This biographical fact created an interesting key for the play when staged in Skopje. In their everyday lives, most of the public who went to see the performances passed by the house that still existed on the street St. Klement Ohridski and in which the events took place. Written in 1976, the play had its première two years later, due to censorship. After 24 years, MNT decided to perform this play on the jubilee of the liberation of the city. The theatre scholar and professor Jelena Lužina, in her text *Dušan Jovanović, the Liberator of Skopje* (Душан Јовановиќ, ослободител на Скопје) published in *The Liberation of Skopje* (Ослободувањето на Скопје, Liljana Mazova, 415) says that this incidental and occasional staging of the play automatically meant – an unsuccessful one. On the other hand, it was staged only one year after the war conflict in Macedonia. History had created another context for this performance, without any consideration about its first intention. And that makes things interesting.

Dušan Jovanović: *The Life of Provincial Playboys or Others' We Want, Ours We Keep* (Življenje podeželskih prejbojev ali Tuje hočemo, svojega ne damo)

The Life of Provincial Playboys is the fourth drama by Dušan Jovanović. It premiered in Slovene Permanent Theatre in Trieste (Italy) on 14 April 1972, directed by the

author himself. It is a play that is marked by Jovanović's interest with a playfulness and theatrical form. The latter brought him to the genre of the theatre of the absurd, however in *Playboys* it was rather a dialogue with theatrical past. It was written as a paraphrase of a canovaccio, a scenario of *commedia dell' arte*, by an anonymous author. There are ten dramatis personae on stage, five pairs of husbands and wives who are constantly trying to cheat on his/her partner. In fact, they have all already slept with each other, but they have managed to conceal the fact. Thus, they are proud of their cunningness when they succeed, on the one hand, and terrified of being cheated upon, on the other. The contrast between their beliefs and the truth is a source of endless comic situations and it is a potential for a show-off of the actors' brilliance and virtuosity.

It was restaged only once in the repertory theatres (SNT Drama Ljubljana in 2007/08, directed by Jaka Andrej Vojevec). In Macedonia, *The Life of Provincial Playboys* was staged at National Theatre Jordan Hađi Konstantinov-Đinot in Veles on 30 November 2002.

Žanina Mirčevska

Slovenian playwright of Macedonian origin Žanina Mirčevska has to be discussed between the Macedonian and Slovenian playwrights as she represents a specific case of Slovenian-Macedonian theatre exchange. We consider her as a Slovenian and Macedonian playwright at the same time. She was born in 1967 in Skopje where she has got her bachelor's degree in theatre directing and dramaturgy from the University of Kiril and Metod. In the 1990s, she moved to Ljubljana, where she has been working ever since. She has become one of the most prominent Slovenian playwrights with five nominations for the Grum Award for the best new Slovenian play, winning the award in 2009 for her text *The End of Atlas*. Thus, neither the Slovenian nor Macedonian audience takes her as a foreign author.

In the last 28 years, she has written fifteen plays in Slovenian language, six of them staged in Slovenian theatres. It is thus interesting that only six texts were also written or translated into Macedonian and that only four were staged in Macedonia (*Dies Irae* in Makedonski naroden teatar, Skopje, 1991; *Sen...* in Teatarska laboratorija, Skopje, 1993; *A Place I've Never Been* and *The Gorge*).

Žanina can thus be considered as a Slovenian playwright of Macedonian origin, however, it is hard to believe that the Macedonian audience would see her works as foreign plays when staged in Macedonian theatres. Nevertheless, we believe that it is precisely the performances of her Slovenian dramas in Macedonian theatres that can be considered as part of the Slovenian-Macedonian theatre exchange.

The Gorge

The Gorge was written in 2006 and premièred on 13 February 2009 at SNT Drama Ljubljana, directed by Andreja Kovač. It is an image of contemporary materialist society where an individual craves material things. The protagonist is “... the one who ate his name” (26), a poor fellow who starves and dreams of earning money for food. However, his appetite for food as well as for everything else is incessant. Already in the first lines, when he finds some mushrooms in the woods and starts picking them up, one can see the vicious circle of capitalist expansion.

If I sell two full baskets,

that is

that is

a pair of trousers, a shirt, some socks, snickers, toilet paper

if I sell three

a trout, bird eggs, *Burrata* cheese, fois gras, goat feta cheese, horse-meat steak, blond and dark Bavaria beer, *Président* butter; I would taste it all; one needs two stomachs like a kangaroo; one trolley is not enough; one needs two; three; five; nine; one needs a truck, several trucks; the big ones, like *Schwarz Müller* or *Raba*.

Pick them up, pick them up, do not leave any. I will open up a business for mushrooms. I will do business. I will export them. To Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala. Where the hell is Guatemala? Where? Where Guatemalans live. Now is not the time to think. GUATEMALA WON'T GO AWAY. A new chapter waits. It is a unique opportunity. It is not a coincidence that mushrooms are a golden colour. No coincidence indeed. Every symbol has its meaning. I HAVE TO PICK THEM ALL UP. Not to leave even one of them. They are mine, all are mine. I will be so terribly, unbelievably RICH ... (27, translated from Slovenian language by G. Troha)

The man is caught as mushrooms are the private property of an old woman, however, he does get extremely rich as she recognises him as her lost son. The idea of owning everything and having wealth without end sends the protagonist on a path of disaster. On the one hand, he wants to have and to try everything. On the other, he even has an urge to provide for others, especially for his employees, but his actions have negative effects, like the death of a little girl's rabbit.

At the end, we have a cyclic structure that brings the protagonist to the scene from the beginning. He is back in the woods, hungry and searching for mushrooms. He meets a bear named Haribo (again an allusion to modern consumerism) that sings him a lullaby and puts him to sleep.

A Place I've Never Been

The play *A Place I've Never Been* by Žanina Mirčevska was written in 1996 and premièred at the Mladinsko Theatre on 16 June 1996, directed by Matjaž Pograjc.

It is a fantasy story of a small village on a hill that is surrounded by a Morass. The latter is taking its toll from the villagers again and again. It is the story of Mayor Peter, a competent vintner, whose bride was taken by the Morass only days after their daughter was born. After eighteen years, Julia is getting married to the poor neighbour Anton, but the Morass is here again. This time, a golden bell from the church falls into the Morass and Julia has to sacrifice herself in order to get it back.

The curse spreads to both families, thus, Mayor Peter drowns himself from grief after not being able to save his daughter. Anton flies away on a cloud with the help of his rooster, the one who put the whole thing in motion by avenging himself to the villagers for not letting him wake them up:

“Well, I also have a sharp beak, which can cut through the rope. Once the Bell has fallen, you will be kneeling in front of me to herald the arrival of dawn. The Church already caresses its wee Bell of gold. It combs and braids threads into a rope, as if it were a maiden’s cloak of hair. Chanticleer dear, whet your rapier, while the Church prepares its Bell of gold for the wedding vows to be told.” (Mirčevska, *A Place* 6)

Julia surrenders to the Morass and the village institutions (The School, The Court and The Church) restore the peace and order of the community.

It thus seems that Mirčevska wants to show her readers/viewers that any deed against nature and its laws has to be punished and it has unforeseeable consequences. However, at the end, it is Bedlam who relativises this notion by the following lines:

Bedlam: Clad in a silken shirt flying in the wind, a man stood on a cloud, looking towards the horizon with the hand shielding his eyes. He floated, and floated and reached a cloud on which a girl stood, clad in a white silk dress. Both clouds united and flew off to the horizon. They flew, and flew, and reached a cloud with three wee curly-haired children on it, three large white steeds and a house with large windows and a huge door. This cloud also joined the first two. All of them flew away on one big cloud, their gazes fixed on the horizon. There must be something beyond the Morass. Nobody knows as nobody has ever been there. But they may already have arrived there on this cloud. (21)

It is a variation of his vision that is repeated several times throughout the text, so it gives an impression of hope, a hope that there is life beyond the conflict between the Morass and people, between people and nature. One suspects a happy-end, a fairy-tale about a couple with a house and three children that is told by Anton to Julia at the beginning, is possible, but the last lines, spoken by Anton, leave us wondering in the dark again:

Anton: ...Maybe they have changed their course. Maybe they landed on another cloud for some rest. Maybe they want to tease me a little. Let them have their fun. We'll play hide-and-peek in the dark. The tired sun is standing on the very edge of the horizon. The large orange slowly sinks into the Morass, as if it would like to observe me floating on my cloud for a little while longer. Where am I floating to? Where!? Is there any harbour for me somewhere?! Everything is infinitely empty. The sky, the Morass, the cloud and I. Nothing else. A landscape of emptiness. The cosmic silence can be heard. This infinitely silent landscape should drive me mad if there were no thoughts of Julia, to warm my heart, no thought of the White Chanticleer to render courage to my soul. He is the personification of true friendship. The quintessence of the absolute sacrifice itself. Self-effacement in the name of friendship, in the name of humanity... How is one to fill this realm of this cosmic silence? How?! ... Julia, Julia, Julia... (22)

It is a parable about the relationship between Society and nature as well as of relationships within the society that is radically pessimistic. However, we have to admit that Žanina Mirčevska does open up a beam of light that might bring some hope if one dares to go beyond, to think and act out of the box, so to speak.

Goran Stefanovski: *Bakanalije [Bacchanalia]*

Bacchanalia was the first play by a Macedonian author staged after 1990 in Slovenia. Goran Stefanovski wrote it after *The Bacchae* by Euripides. It mainly follows the original story and the conflict between Pentheus, the king of Thebe, as the rational side and the god Dionysus as the intuitive one. In both plays, seeing a ritual is a crime against the gods and has to be punished. Euripides puts Pentheus in the hands of his followers led by Agave, Pentheus's mother, who rips his body apart and brings his head as a trophy back to Thebe. When Agave realises the truth, it is too late, and she has to flee in exile together with her sisters while barbarian hordes led by Dionysus destroy the city.

Stefanovski wrote his version after the wars in ex-Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s. He introduced new dramatis personae (that is, Woodman, Guard, Fugitive), thus, writing a commentary of the contemporary society and madness in the Balkans. Furthermore, the author changes the ending. If Euripides in his *Bacchae* breaks the cycle of the myth in a sense that it prevents Pentheus from rising from the dead, Stefanovski restores the cyclic structure. Pentheus returns at the end to report of his death and leaves together with Dionysus. It is, nevertheless, a disenchanting world where Teiresias loses his prophetic powers but sees again, a messenger (Woodman) becomes mute, the Guard is blind, Agave and Cadmus are exiled, and even Dionysus has a hangover and is no longer sure what has been happening and what he wants. It seems like the madness is becoming a perpetual state with no end.

Bacchanalia was staged in Nova Gorica (then the Drama Theatre of Primorska, today the Slovene National Theatre Nova Gorica) as a co-production with the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana, on 14 May 1998, directed by Sebastijan Horvat. It was the final production of the students at UL AGRFT. Its two reviews mainly describe the event (Pintar; Pezdir, "Zmagoslavje"). They comment shortly on Stefanovski's text as well, mentioning mainly its connection to Euripides. Slavko Pezdir, however, adds that it is "sometimes a rather 'dry' text". Boris Pintar judges the performance positively, stating that actors "are up to the professional task with their acting and singing". Less enthusiastic was Pezdir, who saw the performance as "an abstract dramatic oratory that leaves a spectator untouched and distanced from the topical theme and possible social engagement".

The play was thus important, as it was the first Macedonian play to be staged in Slovenia after almost a decade. However, its resonance was limited as it was a production of the theatre academy from Ljubljana. It thus did not stimulate productions of Macedonian texts in Slovenian professional theatres in the following years.

Dejan Dukovski: *Dracula and the "theory of relativity"*--+

The new trend of European drama, known as "in-yer-face" theatre in Macedonia is introduced with the work of Dukovski. Actually, his drama *Powder Keg* [Bure baruta], staged 15 October 1994, anticipates the productions of the plays written by the major representatives of this trend – Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. A clear evidence for its popularity is the number of translations (the play has been translated into twenty languages) and the fact that in 1998 it was turned into a film, directed by Goran Paskaljević. The theme of violence, sexual or physical, is always present in the plays of Dukovski. And it always exists as a lack of love and kindness, which, in this world of lost values, are impossible to reach and rediscover. *Dracula*, written in 2002, premièred the same year in SNT Maribor, Slovenia. Written in two languages, Macedonian and English, the play is based on the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and other stories, (myths or truths) about Dracula. Titled identically as Stoker's novel, the play consists of twenty scenes in which every scene has its own title and the last one is a summary of all the previous ones. Dukovski as an author is always playing with tradition, old stories, myths and stereotypes. In this play, he is also playing with his previous plays, he even includes in the text some monologues from another of his plays. Who is Dracula in his play? Dracula is a hospital patient. The story takes place in a mental hospital. This strange and unusual context gives another direction to the story, where Dracula is not the only "troublemaker" or incarnation of evil itself. Even if the focus still remains on this eternal fight between good and evil, we begin to ask ourselves where is that border that decides what is

good and what is bad? We have this feeling that “killing in the name of the Good” is only an old meaningless expression. The legend of Count Dracula, the immortal vampire who sucks blood, has its origins in the fantasy horror novel of Bram Stoker. Dracula, in Romania is famous as a hero who fought for Christianity against the Ottomans. Even his grave is located in a church. So, Dukovski finds a way to unite, to connect these two different stories – one from history and collective memory and the other from fantasy – and of course, to play with them. With his very unique kind of humour, Dukovski depicts a world where violence can easily become an act of love, where purity can suddenly become greed ...

Dracula was staged in the Drama of the SNT Maribor on 18 January 2002, directed by Aleksandar Popovski. It was the most successful performance of the season 2001/02 in the Maribor theatre with fourteen nights on the repertoire and almost 5800 visitors. It is the only performance of a text by Dejan Dukovski till today. Naturally, the reviews discuss the text as well mainly emphasise its intertextual connections to Bram Stoker's novel. One of the reviews also gave a short presentation of the author, mentioning his scenario for the movie *Powder Keg*, directed by Goran Paskaljević (Gruden). The general impression was not particularly positive, though it is true that the reviews do not discuss the play in detail, as they consider it to be a dramatisation of Stoker's novel. Petra Vidali thus wrote: “the play is interesting, sometimes even excellent, a very good idea and flawless staging, however, it is predictable and not entirely convincing” (12). Slavko Pezdir marks his general impression with “already seen” (Pezdir, “V ogledalu”). Special praise is given to the actors, especially Radko Polič Rac (Van Helsing) and Tadej Toš (Dracula). Lučka Gruden, on the other hand, sees an imbalance between the two protagonists as Polič Rac is an experienced actor, and Toš is younger, and adds here also the tension between pornography and philosophy as well as the dramaturgy of fragment vs. a spectator's need for coherence. Nevertheless, her overall judgement is positive, describing *Dracula* as “a memorable performance that will leave an impression with its dream-scenes” (Gruden).

It is surprising that Dukovski has not gotten a second chance in Slovenia. *Dracula* had quite a success with the audience and critics. Perhaps it was the fact that it was seen as an adaptation of a novel and not so much as an example of new Macedonian writing. A much more present and well-known author is Goran Stefanovski.

Goran Stefanovski: *Odyssey*

Commissioned by the Ulysses Theatre, Brioni, for its ten-year anniversary, this play was realised as a co-production between Ulysses Theatre, Brioni (Croatia); Atelier 212 Theatre, Belgrade; Gavella Drama Theatre, Zagreb (Croatia); SNT, Novi Sad; the Drama

of the SNT Maribor (Slovenia); Theatre Navigator, Skopje (Macedonia) and Sterijino pozorje, Novi Sad. It premièred on 20 July 2012. In his play, Stefanovski incorporated fragments from Homer's *Odyssey* and from *The Trojan Women* by Euripides. Structured in 23 scenes, the story has a circular narrative, where the last scene is a continuation of the first. Stefanovski takes only the skeleton of the epic tragedy of Odysseus and changes the dimension from mythical to a more human and individual point of view, giving voice to those who did not have the opportunity to speak. For example, Penelope is not depicted as the symbol of a faithful woman who has spent twenty years of her life waiting for her husband, on the contrary, she is an abandoned woman who has had to raise a child all alone and take care of everything, life has not stopped for her, for Telemachus and for the citizens of Ithaca after the departure of Odysseus, but continues with all difficulties and problems it can bring. The people of Ithaca hardly remember Odysseus, and those who remember him, seek revenge on him, the murderer of their fathers, not the hero. In fact, Stefanovski questions the existence of a hero in the post-war period. What does it mean to be a hero? Was Odysseus really a hero? Yes, if the war is perceived as a chance for heroic acts, but in the play of Stefanovski the war is seen as plunder. We see the consequences. The homecoming and the obstacles during the journey are not in the focus, they are represented as a play within a play, with a certain parody. Ithaca was not waiting still and unchanged for Odysseus to return. Everything has changed, even Odysseus himself. By the time this play was written and staged, almost twenty years had passed since the devastating war and conflicts that marked these lands, establishing borders that were not only geographic, but also emotional. Realised as a co-production, *Odysseus* brought together artists from countries that were part of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. And they told the story of the hero who returned home just to find that his home was totally changed and disintegrated. And it took him twenty years to return home from war. If Ithaca, perceived in this way, refers to the disintegrated Yugoslavia, are we still returning to our homes or are we already there, but cannot recognise them? What means "home" for the generations that lived in the period of transition? There is a scene in which the mother of Odysseus tells him that a new generation has grown up and soon he will no longer have anyone with whom he can speak about the war. Later, there is a conversation between the son and the father, which reminds of the dialogue between Zoran and his father in *The Liberation of Skopje* by D. Jovanović. The son is waiting for the father to return, and when he does, they have nothing to say to each other because they cannot understand one another. In Stefanovski's play, destiny also takes part, but as a political game between the gods. They are represented as political manipulators who create our destiny, seen in Odysseus's words that are repeated as a refrain: "Who are you working for?" Stefanovski's *Odysseus* is a drama for the hero who got old.

The play was a vast Yugoslav co-production directed by Aleksandar Popovski and with an international cast from participating theatres. It was on the repertoire for

sixteen nights, thirteen of them on tour, and was seen by almost 9,300 spectators. It was thus an exclusive performance that could be seen in Slovenia, more precisely in Maribor, only three nights, thus a scarce number of two reviews is understandable (one of the première on Brioni and the other one from the reprise in Maribor). Both authors are enthusiastic about the actors, especially Ozren Grabarić (Odyssey) and Nataša Matjašec (Athena), as well as about the meticulous direction of Aleksandar Popovski. Less in tune are Peter Rak and Vesna Jurca Tadel at judging Stefanovski's text. It is "an excellent text" (23) for Rak and "an unbalanced text" (22) for Jurca Tadel. Nevertheless, they both seem to stay rather cold in their final judgement. "Nothing exceptional, but exciting enough to create an unusual theatre experience." (Rak 23) Jurca Tadel is more specific: "Nevertheless, the result of this performance is fascination over form – over an excellent directing, extraordinarily natural acting of the leading actor, over humour that is carefully scattered around the whole performance that is aesthetically perfect and at some moments even inspiring" (22).

Odyssey was primarily a proof of possible co-operation in the region of former Yugoslavia. It was a vast co-production that brought together some of the best actors from different countries. It was seen in Slovenia as an experiment or perhaps better as an exclusive theatre experience that did not, unfortunately, open up the doors for similar projects in the future. Co-productions exist but are mainly smaller. One of those featured *Naked* by Viktorija Rangelova.

Viktorija Rangelova: *Naked (Gola)*³

Written by the Macedonian dramatist Viktorija Rangelova, this play premiered on 12 October 2013 in Ljubljana City Theatre and co-produced by ŠKUC theatre. *Naked* is a psychological drama that explores the relationship between a middle-aged woman (Patricia, 47) and a younger man (Lev, 25). Everything happens in just one room. Everything happens behind the closed door and the four walls. This claustrophobic atmosphere is perfect for developing a third character, and in this play that is the torridity, the unsupportable warmth. There is a possibility of escaping, but who knows if that is the right way. The author leaves open the question of salvation "if they go outside, it is possible that they could (not) find the right way" says at the beginning. It seems that the characters are victim and villain at the same time. Composed of four scenes, the play reveals the internal conflicts of each of the characters, which is typical for psychological drama. In Lev that conflict results with a physical manifestation: every time Patricia touches him, his leg performs some strange DANCE. The beauty of

³ The play was also performed on 28 December 2012 at ŠKUC Gallery as a reading performance directed by Špela Kravogel under the title *An Impossible Relationship* [Nemogoča zveza]. It was a part of a process that resulted in a performance of *Naked* in 2013 that is analysed in more detail.

Patricia, her long beautiful legs, her eroticism is in contrast with her age, her loneliness and her abandonment. The theme focuses on an old taboo, a myth connected to the incest. The strange DANCE that we see repeat through the scenes, the sleeping position of Lev that reminds one of a foetus, the words that Patricia repeats: "I love you more, and that's the way it should be," are all signs that lead us to the moment of culmination, in which Lev calls Patricia "Mother".

The text was commissioned by association ŠKUC and co-produced by Ljubljana City Theatre in 2013. It was staged on the small stage, which mainly puts mainly experimental performances. It was directed by Alen Jelen and had a moderate success with sixteen nights and almost 1200 visitors. Reviews were mainly positive, with unanimous praise for Nataša Barbara Gračner, a very well-established actress from SNT Drama Ljubljana, who played the role of Patricia, and a young graduate from the UL AGRFT, Jernej Gašperin, who had just started his career at the Ljubljana City Theatre and Lev was his first major role (Pezdir 16, Perne 22, Krečič).

It is interesting that none of the critics analysed Viktorija Rangelova's text or tried to put it in the context of contemporary Macedonian drama. As if there has not been a gap of more than a decade from the disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia before a Macedonian text (*Dracula* by Dejan Dukovski) was staged in Slovenia and yet another decade passed before *Odyssey* by Goran Stefanovski and *Naked* followed.

Goran Stefanovski: *Figurae Veneris Historiae*

Goran Stefanovski was commissioned to write a play that would be directed by Aleksandar Popovski in SNT Drama Ljubljana. The year 2014 marked one hundred years since the beginning of World War I. This occasion established a symbolic dialogue with one of the largest wars in history, creating a pretext, which permitted Stefanovski to take the war as the main theme in his new play. In fact, it became the main character. Entitled *Figurae Veneris Historiae*, the play is based on *Sexual History of the World War*, a book by Magnus Hirschfeld, a German Jewish physician and sexologist, a book that Stefanovski discovered during his puberty in his father's library. The play premièred on 16 October 2014, in SNT Drama Ljubljana. Written as a tragic farce in two acts, it portrays eleven dramatis personae who represent different social classes struggling to survive in the war conflict. The farcical code used to reconsider the history, reminds us of the words of Marx, that all great world-historic facts and personages appear twice: the first time as a tragedy, the second time as a farce. Stefanovski has found the perfect way to look at the war from another angle. The war in his play is perceived as a massive and organised violence, as an orgy, a bacchanalia. The title *Figurae Veneris Historiae* gives a very simple message – there is something

pornographic in history, especially in conflict situations. Evil is like a plague. And when there is a plague, everything turns upside down. The killer becomes a hero. The war becomes a business. A necessity. The story is presented as a hypnotherapy, and Magnus Hirschfeld appears as the narrator. This gives originality to the approach to the theme of war in a way that it permits a more intimate, confidential viewpoint. In a situation where violence has occupied us, we are hungry for love, for a kind word, for warmth, but in a world where politics takes advantage of us, that is impossible. From time to time, these characters stay still and try to listen to something: the silence behind the chaos, the noise, the beautiful silence. But the immoral history of war and conflicts is louder. After the First World War comes the Second, then the Cold one ... it seems it has an infinite echo.

The first performance was quite successful with 21 nights on the repertoire and almost 5500 visitors, which pairs it to a dramatization of *Die Zauberberg* by Thomas Mann in the same season. Reviews were mainly positive, some of them even characterising it as: "one of the most coherent performances, and not only on this stage" (Rogelj). They were unanimous in praising the actors, scenography and music, especially Janez Škof as Magnus Hirschfeld. Nevertheless, some do mention a lack of contextualisation of the main theme: "The most visible is the massive consumption of sexual tension, that lacks clearer contextualisation, which could bring it to a more abstract level and make it a relevant theme for the contemporary audience" (Arhar 17). Nika Leskovšek puts it into the following question: "What does a performance like this tell us in a time when one-third of the states on the globe are involved in different war conflicts – does it manage to get through to our distanced position" (21).

Goran Stefanovski is thus the most popular and established contemporary Macedonian author in Slovenian theatre. He was accepted into the Slovenian scene also with the Vilenica International Literary Prize that is awarded by a jury comprised of literary experts from different disciplines ranging from publishing business, comparative literature and different languages of Central Europe. Slovenian theatre institutions commissioned two of his analysed plays, however, it is notable that his compatriot Aleksandar Popovski directed them both. As if his work does not get through to Slovenian directors, as all three dramas (*Bacchanalia*, *Odyssey* and *Figurae Veneris Historiae*) were well received by actors, audience and critics.

Conclusion

According to the statistics presented in this essay, the exchange of drama between Slovenia and Macedonia from 1990 till 2015 was a scarce one. In a period of twenty-five years, only six texts of Macedonian authors were staged in Slovenia, and eight Slovenian ones in Macedonian theatres. In fact, during the 1990s, there were no Macedonian play staged in Slovenia – an exception being *Bacchanalia* by Goran Stefanovski that was produced by the Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television in the 1998 and *Powder Keg* by Dejan Dukovski in the off-scene by Dejmo stisnt teater in 1998. The last play by a Slovenian author that was staged on the Macedonian professional theatre scene dates back to 2005 (*Metamorphoses* by Tina Kosi). In addition, the last Macedonian play staged in Slovenia was in 2014 (*Figurae Veneris Historiae* by Goran Stefanovski). Furthermore, if we observe the basic data about the performances in question, we can draw some further observations. From the performance of *Bacchanalia* by G. Stefanovski (1998), four years have passed until the next staging of a Macedonian author. Dejan Dukovski, one of the most translated and famous Macedonian authors, was introduced to the Slovenian theatre scene for the first time only in 2002 (surprisingly, Dejan Dukovski was not introduced in Slovenia with his most famous plays that have made a revolution in dramaturgy and are staged all over the world, but with *Dracula*, the only text by this author that has been staged in Slovenia till today). The other two texts that followed, again with a gap of a decade, were from the author that is already known to the Slovenian audience, Goran Stefanovski with *Odyssey* in 2012 and *Figurae Veneris Historiae* in 2014. Furthermore, it is interesting that Aleksandar Popovski directed them both. Until 1983, the Slovenian directors (for example, Zvone Šedlbauer, Jože Tiran and Mile Korun) showed an interest in staging texts written by Macedonian authors. On the other hand, Macedonian directors directed four of the eight texts by Slovenian authors staged in Macedonia.

What lies behind this fact? Could the reason be a scarcity of translated material? Or is it a question of motives and themes that are not suitable? When analysing the plays staged in Macedonia and Slovenia, we can find some similarities in the motifs that inspired the authors and motivated the directors to stage particular texts, for example, the shadow of the former hero (Jason in *Medea* by Dane Zajc and *Odyssey* in Goran Stefanovski's play), or the war, the eternal conflict between the individual and the society, etc. According to the analysis of the reception of the Macedonian drama in Slovenia, we can say that it is not a question of lack of interest. The reviews are quite positive and the numbers of audience good ones. Unfortunately, we cannot reconstruct the Macedonian reception of Slovenian plays, as relevant reviews do not exist.

As we mentioned earlier, one of the possible reasons for such moderate exchange

could be the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In fact, the Slovenian authors that were staged after 1990 are mainly the same authors that were introduced in the 1980s, well known to the Macedonian theatre practitioners: Dušan Jovanović, Drago Jančar and Dane Zajc. So practically, these authors somehow represent a continuation of earlier-known collaboration. Despite the fact that in 2006, with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, a book of contemporary Slovenian drama was published in Macedonian language and included the authors Saša Pavček, Tina Kosi, Dragica Potočnjak and Matjaž Zupančič, these texts have never been staged/produced (except *Metamorphoses* by Tina Kosi). In this case, we can say that the reason for this indifference does not lie in the scarcity of translation. The general impression provided by these facts is one of a reciprocal ignorance towards and detachment from the recent, contemporary dramaturgy between our countries. Contrary to the collaboration in the other fields of theatrical practice (visiting directors and artists), the exchange in the field of drama seems to be almost vanishing. It is probably the result of a more general turn of Slovenian and Macedonian cultural policy and interest in international relations. These focuses were and still are the countries of European Union, the USA, and in the last years, India and China. An analysis of translations and performances of Slovenian drama abroad between 1980 and 2015 clearly show this trend (see Troha). It is hard to suggest what is to be done. Clearly, growth in the number of new productions can only come about if Slovenian directors or other theatre professionals take an active interest in Macedonian drama and vice versa.

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