

Preface

Maja Šorli, Editor-in-Chief

In 2018, Simona Semenič, an all-round theatre maker, received the Prešeren Foundation Award for her creative opus in the previous two years. At last, a female dramatist, performer, producer, pedagogue, writer and, of course, dramaturg and theatre director occupied the most prominent stages in Slovenian theatre and, with her work, convinced the national award juries for both literature and performing arts. “Simona Semenič is one of the most important contemporary theatre figures in Slovenia,” Petra Vidali wrote in the award justification. For this reason, we decided to devote an academic symposium to Simona Semenič in October 2018 entitled *Simona Semenič: To Each Their Own Sweet Poison*. The symposium, convened by *Amfiteater* journal, was part of a series of events in the frame of the 24th City of Women International Contemporary Arts Festival entitled *Simona Semenič Season* and was co-organised by the Slovenian Theatre Institute and the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana in cooperation with the City of Women International Contemporary Arts Festival and the Department of Slovenian Studies of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. This alone attests to the fact that her work, especially her dramatics, attracts widespread interest. In the mentioned justification, Petra Vidali identifies “the thematic preoccupations of her writing: revealing systemic, legal and tolerated violence – political, military, financial and time and again – throughout the ages and in all spheres of society – gender violence; dissecting positions of power and subordination; giving voice to the suppressed, silenced and marginalised”. As playwright and writer, Simona Semenič published two books in 2017, *do you hear me?* and *three dramas*, and has until now received three Slavko Grum Awards for the best new Slovenian play. Her texts are staged extensively at home and abroad. At the most recent national 54th Maribor Theatre Festival, the performance based on her play *no title yet*, directed by Tomi Janežič and produced by the Mladinsko Theatre, was awarded the Borštnik Grand Prix for the best performance. In her recent works, Simona Semenič has devoted herself to developing erotic vocabulary, dealing courageously with (female, although we could also call it – contemporary) sexuality in a way we have never seen before in Slovenian as well as in European drama. The first performance of *this apple, made of gold* is announced for 5 December 2019 in Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana.

The present issue brings together six articles and two essays about the contents described above. By way of a literary interpretation of the creative opuses of Zofka

Kveder and Simona Semenič, biographical information and other writings, Mateja Pezdirc Bartol compares the educational and creative paths of both authors. Based on the dramatic opus of Simona Semenič, Mia Hočevar formulates and gives a comprehensive analysis of the typology of victim, classifying victims into three types: the collective victim (corpses, children and society), the female victim and “the victim Simona Semenič”. Eva Pori delves into the language surfaces of this no longer dramatic writing and examines the new or, better, different (language) form of texts to be performed in connection to three different, until now unexplored in Semenič’s opus, aspects and theories: Jakobson’s theory of the sign, Heidegger’s hermeneutic thought about language and Novarina’s theory of theatre as speech. The article by Ivana Zajc is interesting and original especially because of the stylometric method used to analyse Simona Semenič’s works, with which the article’s author objectivises the usual, non-digital literary analyses. It is also the first example of the digital humanities in the journal *Amfiteater*. Krištof Jacek Kozak examines how two plays, *sophia or while i almost ask for more or a parable of the ruler and the wisdom* and *seven cooks, four soldiers and three sophias*, integrate poetic expression with the political in an unprecedented way. In the last article, Maja Murnik elaborates on the observation that the corpses in Simona Semenič’s dramatic works are not mere dead bodies, but that they should be understood as transitional bodies occupying the liminal space between life and death. These living-dead bodies function as corpses-witnesses or as *homines sacri* (Agamben) and point to the fundamental structure of the workings of biopolitical power.

The thematic block includes also two essays about the stagings of the most frequently translated play by Simona Semenič dating from 2008. Ljudmil Dimitrov, who translated *5boys.si* to Bulgarian, writes about the circumstances of this production, about the interjections permeating the text as well as the play’s reception in Bulgaria. Kristina Hagström-Ståhl focuses on the staging directed by Anja Suša in Backa Theatre in Gothenburg, Sweden, which has acquired a legendary status since its première in 2012. All these considerations of Simona Semenič’s dramatic work are framed by an article by Kim Komljanec about Slovenian drama on domestic and international stages. Her reflection begins at the London conference Contemporary European Drama in Translation on the British Stage and ends – inevitably – with describing the conditions necessary for Slovenian drama to thrive.

If Simona Semenič, as a female dramatist, has after all achieved due recognition in the wider cultural space over the past few years, in the spirit of her efforts to bring greater visibility to marginalised contents, we are publishing two book reviews that document the less visible history of contemporary dance and scenography in Slovenia. Maša Radi Buh reviewed contemporary dance criticism of a forty-year period gathered in *Day, Night + Man = Rhythm: An Anthology of Slovenian Contemporary*

Dance Criticism 1918–1960, prepared and edited by Rok Vevar. She writes that this extensive work “in one place records and thus affirms both contemporary dance practice as well as its corresponding criticism. The publication of a wide range of texts constitutes the history of contemporary dance as well as proves that contemporary dance was not overlooked but actually had a rather high profile in the media.” In a review of the two-volume monograph by Ana Kocjančič *The Space Within the Space: Scenography in Slovenia from the 17th Century Until 1991*, Mateja Fajt writes that it is “a ground-breaking work that considers scenography as an integral part of scientific research”. Adding, “Ana Kocjančič does not focus solely on the monographs written by scenographers or on theoretical perspectives on scenography, but turns to the foundations, to history, and explores the development of scenography in the area of today’s Slovenia from this perspective. This is an exhaustive work that systematically records the development of this type of creativity and investigates the influence of social, artistic and theatrical currents on how scenographies are created.”

The last paragraph of the editorial is also the time to bid farewell, since in 2020, Gašper Troha will assume the position of editor-in-chief. Back in 2015, *Amfiteater – Journal of Performing Arts Theory*, co-published by the Slovenian Theatre Institute and the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana, gained a renewed impetus. The new editorship prepared five extensive volumes which covered themes such as European theatre systems, audience experience, embodied critique, the absent body, contemporary theatre forms such as choreopoem, inoperative theatre, verbatim theatre and new textual proceduralisms, we introduced the notion of devised theatre to Slovenia and documented lesbian theatre in Slovenia ... We devoted thematic issues to contemporary political theatre in Slovenia, Macedonian-Slovenian theatre relations, kamishibai and, now, to Simona Semenič. During these five years, we also published twenty-eight book reviews, twenty-five of which were for publications published in Slovenian. *Amfiteater* continues to prove that academic research of contemporary performing arts in Slovenia is particularly vital. Here, I would specifically like to thank the director of the Slovenian Theatre Institute, Mojca Jan Zoran, and the research group at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana. I wish also to thank the journal’s “colophon” team, the Slovenian and international editorial boards, the reviewers of academic articles, the collaborators of *Amfiteater* and, especially, Jana Renée Wilcoxon for her advice and editing work in English. And in the end, thanks to all of you who read, follow and create contemporary performing arts.

Translated by Katja Kosi