

In this paper, we will focus on one of the most active and successful artists in the contemporary Slovenian theatre, the dramatist Simona Semenič, and one of her most theoretically intriguing texts, *the feast or the story of a savory corpse or how roman abramovič, the character janša, julia kristeva, age 24, simona semenič and the initials z. i. found themselves in a tiny cloud of tobacco smoke* (2010). We will look at how the text affects the viewer/reader, whom the author directly and constantly addresses through the character of the narrator. Based on an analysis of the form and content of the selected text, we will assess to what extent it can be classified as no-longer-dramatic text (Poschmann) or as "dramatic drama" (*dramatisches Drama* – Birgit Haas) and put in the field of postdramatic theatre (Lehmann). The paper aims to analyse the (no longer or again?) dramatic form of *the feast*, the specifics of the author's writing style and the construction of the text. On the other hand, it also aims to explain the author's methods of emphasising the ethical and moral responsibility of those involved (especially the readers/viewers) in the happening.

Keywords: Simona Semenič, *the feast*, dramatic form, postdramatic theatre, no-longer-dramatic text, dramatic, drama, ethics

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Dramatic Form and the Ethical Dimension of the Text *the feast* by Simona Semenič

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This paper deals with the content and formal analysis of Simona Semenič's text entitled *the feast or the story of a savory corpse or how roman abramovič, the character janša, julia kristeva, age 24, simona semenič and the initials z. i. found themselves in a tiny cloud of tobacco smoke* (2010, hereafter referred to as *the feast*). Semenič is one of the most prominent and radical playwrights in contemporary Slovenian drama. Her writing breaks with established conventions of drama, which is evident in the absence of punctuation and capitals, and above all in the transcendence of the division between the main and the side text, as the *didascalies* in her works are no longer (only) staging directions but become an equal part of the text. In her texts, Semenič raises various social-critical themes and ethical questions and involves the reader/viewer in the action, thus placing him/her in the role of a participant in the action and, above all, co-responsible for the state of society.

At the same time, in her texts, she is never only concerned with a fictional or ideological construction of the world, which she tries to deconstruct, but is also interested in descending into the real. This would be difficult to achieve in the framework of a traditional drama, which takes place in a fictional world, is trapped in its own absoluteness, and its author (as narrator) is absent. That is why Semenič persistently resists and problematises these conventions: she addresses the spectator; she does not accept the position of a neutral or superior author who merely observes the situation from the outside but constantly poses challenges and even intrudes into her plays herself, with subjective remarks and various intermezzi. Her writing thus represents the intrusion of the real and the performative into dramatic fiction, thus destroying its structure, rules and laws.

The text *the feast* has a strong ethical imperative because it directly addresses the active reader/viewer. But here, we do not understand the notion of "active participation" in the sense of physical involvement in a performance, as, for example, avant-garde theatre aspired to, but rather from Rancière's definition that "seeing is also action".

Therefore, being a reader or a spectator is not a passive position that needs to be turned into an activity because it is an active activity in itself. The spectator is involved in the performance on an emotional and cognitive level. Semenič's work does indeed demand the engagement of the reader/viewer. Not in a political sense but in the sense of resolving the questions, ideas and feelings her drama raises.

Regarding the dramatic form, we note that Simona Semenič's writing is characterised by both the undermining of established reading conventions and the destabilisation of the fundamental concepts of drama theory. Slovenian theatre critic and dramaturg Blaž Lukan defines *the feast* as a new textual practice that falls within the methodological field of the postdramatic, as defined by the German theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann in his work *Postdramatic Theatre*. In Lukan's view, these new textual practices are not about a radical break with traditional, nor even modern, playwriting. Instead, they are rather a radicalisation (and at the same time a transcendence) of certain formal dramaturgical procedures. Based on an analysis of the contextual and formal characteristics of the text *the feast* and a review of some theories of contemporary theatre, we can undoubtedly confirm that Simona Semenič's work (or at least *the feast* specifically) can no longer be defined as a traditional, modern or conventional dramatic text, but belongs to the field of postdramatic theatre. This is reflected in several converging features, highlighting the following: 1) using the possibility of direct communication with the audience; 2) dialogue returns between stage and audience while diminishing on stage (moving away from representation towards eventfulness); 3) resisting notions of traditional theatre such as imitation, catharsis, illusion, etc. (e.g., by breaking down the fourth wall); 4) experimenting with attempts to break through fictional constraints and crossing the boundaries of conventions (according to Aldo Milohnič, the category of "unconventional drama"); 5) mixing different genre elements ("epic" narration of the host, "dramatic" confession of the corpse, the appearance of a "lyric poem").

At first glance, due to the author's violation of many dramatic conventions, one could almost certainly say that *the feast* belongs to the category of no-longer-dramatic texts (Gerda Poschmann), whose main characteristics are the radical deconstruction of the dramatic form or its transformation, and the introduction of epic and lyrical elements. Some theorists (e.g., Nika Leskovšek, Tomaž Toporišič), however, express their reservations about this classification and offer as an alternative solution one of the more recent theories of contemporary drama – the theory of Birgit Haas, who introduced the term *dramatisches Drama* or "dramatic drama".

Semenič is constantly testing and pushing the boundaries of playwriting and discovering how the dramatic can (again) exist in the field of the postdramatic. This is also the subject of the theory of post-postdramatic theatre, defined by Élisabeth Angel-

Perez. She perceives a return to the theatre of words, in which the author maintains one's presence through lyricisation, epicisation, essayisation and rhapsodicisation. This theatre is therefore still postdramatic, but at the same time, it returns to drama and dramatization. Angel-Perez describes it as "experiments that belong to the so-called 'postdramatic theatre', but as (post)deconstruction theatre, they ended up re-dramatising everything they were trying to de-dramatise", which perfectly describes the form of *the feast* and the writing of Simona Semenič in general.

We find ourselves at the intersection of (post)postdramatic drama and theatre, where the individual modes of writing are still being established, but they are also intertwined. Therefore, we do not (yet) have a definitive and certain answer as to whether *the feast* belongs to any of the contemporary theatre theories. We can only say with certainty that it belongs to the field of postdramatic theatre. However, within it, it establishes strategies of revisiting the dramatic and the dramatised, thus going beyond the no-longer-dramatic texts, and contains elements of dramatic drama and post-postdramatic theatre.