

The paper analyses the introduction of the themes of poverty, social exclusion, classism and class shame into the field of contemporary Slovenian drama in the form of a case study. The documentary theatre production *The Bailiff Jernej and His Rights* (*Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica*), directed by Žiga Divjak, was created in 2018 as one of the many events marking the 100th anniversary of the death of Ivan Cankar, the author of the work of the same title upon which Divjak based the performance. Divjak's documentary reinterpretation of Cankar's short story *The Bailiff Jerney and His Rights* performs an engaged gesture of empowerment of the invisible and underpaid working forces, who are thus given a voice in the public sphere. Divjak draws central thematic motifs such as precarious work, workers' rights, subordination and poverty from Cankar's "social tale" and, through the gesture of documentary research, transposes them to the present time, thus affirming the idea of the deep-rooted existence of the proletariat, even if, with a time lag, it appears today in a different form and with altered effects. The attribute is precisely the "play", which could also be described as a "dramatic text" since the dramatic is inscribed into it not in terms of form and dramaturgical elements but as the essence and effect of documentary narratives.

Keywords: poverty, working class, documentary drama, classism, class shame, Ivan Cankar, Žiga Divjak

Zala Dobovšek is a dramaturg, theatre scholar and assistant professor of dramaturgy and performing arts at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). She graduated from UL AGRFT with a degree in dramaturgy and also studied at the Theatre Academy DAMU in Prague (Divadelní fakulta Akademie múzických umění v Praze). In 2019, she received her PhD from UL AGRFT (Department of Dramaturgy and Performing Arts) with the dissertation *Theatre and War: Fundamental Relations between Performing Arts and the Wars on the Territory of Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s*. She is the current president of the Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia. She works as a dramaturg, theatre critic, critical writing mentor and pedagogue.

zala.dobovsek@yahoo.com

The Bailiff Jernej (2018): Documentary Representation of Poverty and Social Shame

Zala Dobovšek

Academy for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, University of Ljubljana

The paper analyses the introduction of the themes of poverty, social exclusion, classism and class shame into the field of contemporary Slovenian drama in the form of a case study. The documentary theatre production *The Bailiff Jernej and His Rights* (*Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica*), directed by Žiga Divjak, was created in 2018 as one of the many events marking the 100th anniversary of the death of Ivan Cankar, the author on whose work of the same title the performance is based. Divjak's adaptation of the original (from 1907) was remarkable because, in the process of reinterpreting the original story, it completely bypassed Cankar's writing and narrative, only to open it up to a new time and place and, first and foremost, to the current social climate. In doing so, he has extracted from the literary original the basic ideas of the narrative, which, after more than a hundred years in reality and practice, may look and act differently, but whose internal structure is virtually identical. Divjak draws central thematic motifs such as precarious work, workers' rights, subordination and poverty from Cankar's "social tale" and, through the gesture of documentary research, transposes them to the present time, thus affirming the idea of the deep-rooted existence of the proletariat, even if, with a time lag, it appears today in a different form and with altered effects. While the original focuses on a single example of workers' exploitation and abuse of a position of power, Divjak's reinterpretation encompasses a broader spectrum of examples of contemporary workers' exploitation – both physical and intellectual. The attribute is precisely the "play", which could also be described as a "dramatic text" since the dramatic is inscribed in it not in terms of form and dramaturgical elements but as the essence and effect of documentary narratives. It is not a conventional form of dramatic text but a "documentary textual material", structured as a collage of first-person narratives of workers from the sphere of precarious labour relations (cleaners, immigrants and construction workers, drivers, bricklayers, security guards, chambermaids, traffickers, cooks, caregivers and young self-employed architects). Over several months, Divjak worked with various associations fighting for workers' rights.

Factuality is introduced into the performance material in the form of excerpts from interviews with anonymous precarious workers that are subsequently transformed into a montage (or almost a report). Although at first glance, it seems that the dialogue between the characters might appear overly mechanical and impersonal, the text is precisely worked out at the structural level of thematic and rhythmic integration so that the three elements of the statement function as a three-part collective body. This body is characteristically layered and complex, but in the search for a common problematic point, it is highly synchronised and almost virtuosic in delivering sometimes short, momentary and cutting rejoinders. In making this documentary text or stage template, it is evident that the parallel development of the directorial concept has already influenced its form. The dynamics of the writing, the lines, the pauses and the repetitions are very precise, almost acting as a kind of composition in which symbolic exhaustion and, at the same time, unexpected poetry are intertwined. Since Divjak's text is direct testimony, it is placed in the form of a literal (verbatim) drama (and later theatre), which strives to present the truth as authentically as possible, or at least to give an authentic account. A common characteristic of verbatim formats is the modest and chamber-like setting, without other interruptions and centred on a pure, unhindered narration of experience.

Divjak's documentary reinterpretation of Cankar's short story *The Bailiff Jernej and His Rights* performs an engaged gesture of empowerment of the invisible and underpaid working forces, who are thus given a voice in the public sphere. Not only in the wider public discourse (politics and media), the domestic performance scene also suffers from a lack of diversity in the representation of social classes. In reality, the dominant representation of (material/financial) deprivation, which is most often portrayed or understood by mainstream domestic playwrighting (and, consequently, theatre production), portrays a middle or, in places, even upper-middle social class. Divjak's *The Bailiff Jernej and His Rights* also problematises classism, which we recognise as an exclusionary evaluation based on social class and the systemic oppression of the lower classes by the dominant social groups. The middle, upper-middle and upper classes (dominant groups) perceive themselves as smarter and more articulate than the working class and poor people (subordinate groups). Therefore, in this case, the dominant group (middle-class and rich people) always defines what is "normal" and "acceptable" in the class hierarchy for everyone else.