

In Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, 21st-century playwriting is strongly marked by the arrival of the millennial generation. If the older generation of playwrights was preoccupied with the memory of wars, questioning of collective guilt and condemnation of past political entities, and if the established contemporary dramatic corpus is expanded by questions of lost identity, feminism and critique of society, the millennial generation further complicates its dramatic construction with apprehension about globalisation and cultural erasure. As argues Stephan Dark, this gives their work a neo-miserabilist character. In millennial playwriting, which is less burdened by the events of the last century and more marked by the recent economic crises, we can observe even less optimism and utopian imagery. Instead, nihilism and cynicism prevail. Their material is self-referential and creates a world that corresponds to their own present. There is a particular focus on the individual's attitude towards survival in an oppressive, corrupt and dysfunctional system, the individual's search for meaning, related feelings of alienation and the inability to communicate. Through a selection of plays, this paper reflects on the key themes, the form and the atmosphere of millennial playwriting, which seems to be more marked by the uncertainty of the status quo than any previous generation.

Keywords: 21st-century drama, Dino Pešut, Iza Strehar, millennial literature, Gorana Balančević

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The Substance of Millennial Playwriting in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia

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In millennial playwriting, which is less burdened by the events of the last century and more marked by the recent economic crises, we can observe even less optimism and utopian imagery. Instead, nihilism and cynicism prevail. Their subject matter is self-referential and creates a world that corresponds to their own present. There is a particular focus on the individual's attitude towards survival in an oppressive, corrupt and dysfunctional system, the individual's search for meaning, related feelings of alienation and the inability to communicate.

I started my analysis of millennial playwriting in the former Yugoslavia by reading plays produced by different authors and by looking for parallels between them. I then proceeded to shortlist five texts. For the final transcript, I chose the three that most clearly show the main trend of the millennial generation: *Use Me and Discard* (2019) by the Slovenian author Iza Strehar, *The Last Afterparty* (2019) by the Croatian author Dino Pešut and *Ironed* (2011) by the Serbian author Gorana Balančević.

The three analysed authors build their plays, consciously or subconsciously, on neo-miserabilism (a term by Stephen Dark which denotes an inexplicable physical feeling that things are not quite right, while at the same time carrying a hint of optimism), bringing their main (Strehar, Pešut) and side characters (Balančević) to life through a questioning of the present and the hopeless situation they find themselves in, without being active in it. These characters have lived through the experience of contemporary neoliberalism, which instils pessimism because the market rules the world while political actors are incapable of generating change. These characters are different

from their older counterparts (the so-called baby boomers) who experienced rapid social changes in the 1960s and 1970s and are marked by major improvements in health, education, social and political rights. This situation has encouraged the view that ordinary mortals can change the world for the better and solve social problems. Their formative years created a belief in relentless optimism, something that could not be formed while growing up in this century.

As their theme, the plays take the specific problems faced by the generation in question. These premises are alien to the older generations or are ones they did not pay much attention to because other pressing issues (e.g., war) were at the forefront of their minds. The specificity of these plays is that they attach to a particular situation or short-term plot that the older generations might (or often do) label as childish grumbling and as a contradiction to the established social order.

In the development of this writing, it is ultimately crucial to point out that the authors establish the macro conflict through the outline of an overarching condition in which micro conflicts are set at the individual level (the different phases of the condition are often announced by naming the scenes). In doing so, they use the transposition of historical events and artistic movements into contemporary writing (ancient myths, songs, war, etc.) to manifest and interrogate their pessimistic (even nihilistic) view of the situation, which often flows into optimistic conclusions. It is also important to point out that these texts are mostly no longer written as literary works but as performance texts, focusing on the eventual staging and thus making use of moments of meta-theatricality (adding comments for the creative team, addressing the audience, etc.).